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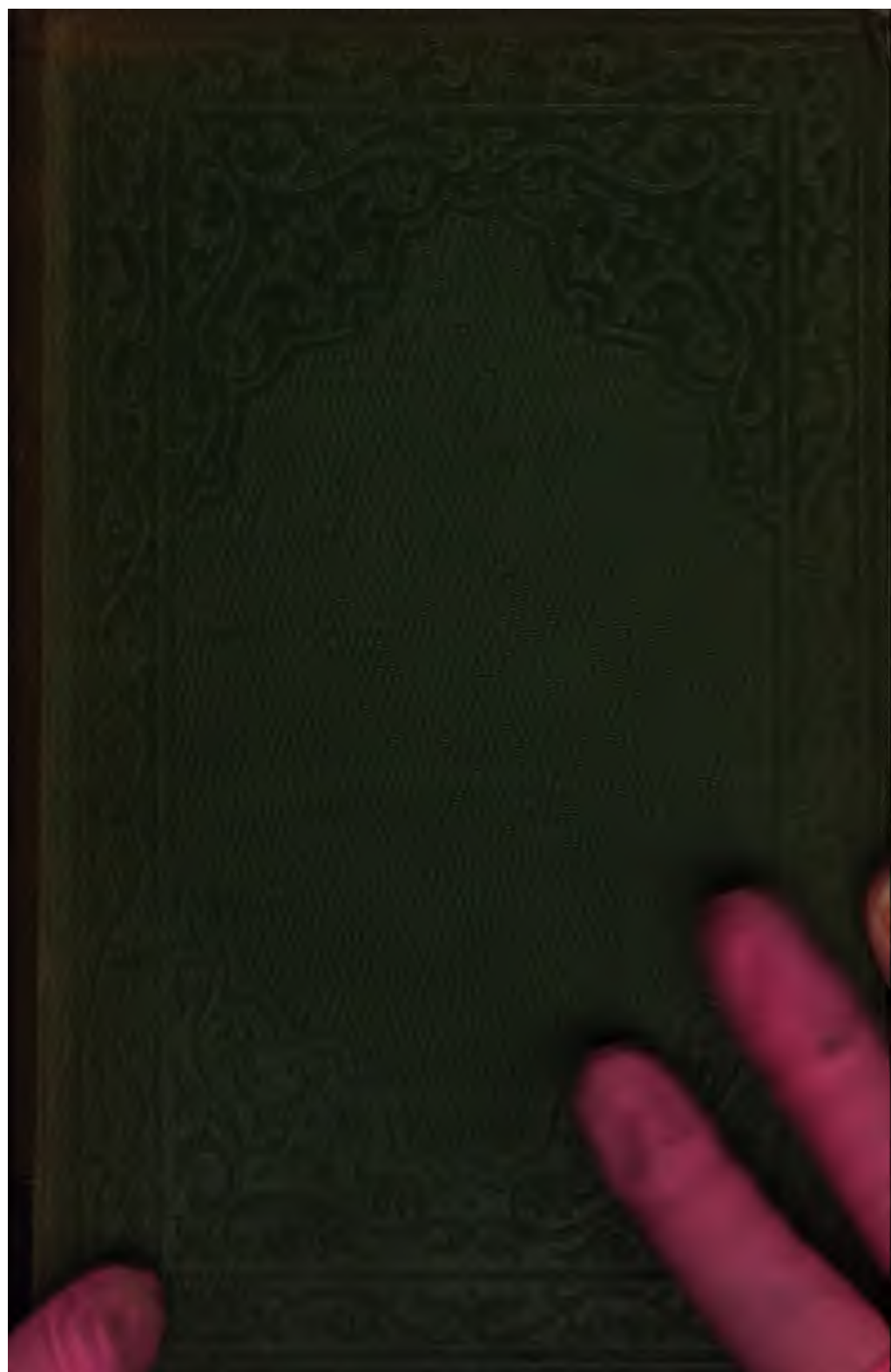
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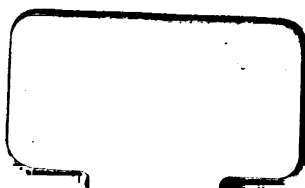
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THE

HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE
HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.

CHAPTER I.

“ His home look’d sad,—for therein bloom’d no child.”

MRS. HEMANS.

It was during Mr. Barry’s absence, on a scowling December morning, that Dr. Merri-dan’s brougham drew up at Beechwood, and the Doctor very briskly stepped out: a far from unusual circumstance in itself, for never many days elapsed without his seeing Mabel; but the fact of his handing out a young lady also *was* unusual.

Miss Somers was at home. With a blythe and jocund air did the Doctor pay his compliments to her and Mrs. Abney, and then presented to them, “ Fräulein von Bunsen, his adopted daughter,” a pretty young girl, of some sixteen summers, plump, fair, and shy-looking, with a clear, pale face, set round with

an abundance of auburn curls, tied fancifully with blue ribbons, falling down her back to her very waist, in most luxuriant fashion. Her figure was as yet unformed, but promised to be symmetrical.

An arch glance did Mabel give the Doctor, as she shook hands with his daughter.

"It is not possible," she said.

"It *is* possible, Miss Somers," returned he.

"Well, you may be assured of a cordial welcome for any one *you* bring to us, Doctor; but we must, indeed, beg you to throw a little light upon this mystery."

"I am quite prepared to do so," he said, looking most amiable and most happy.

Mabel placed the young Eunice in a seat beside herself; and beginning to talk to her, soon found out what pretty light-blue orbs sparkled in the pale, fair face.

"They must make a call upon him soon," the Doctor said, "and see what wonderful improvements he had effected at the Moat: he had really been astonished to find what a handsome house he had been living in for so many years. The rooms looked quite light and cheerful, now he had had the ivy cut away from the windows; and with his young daughter sitting in them, they no longer appeared so

preposterously large and lofty ; she seemed to fill them with an atmosphere of pleasantness."

Fraülein von Bunsen turned to him with much animation, and said something in German which evidently pleased the Doctor mightily, from the look he gave her.

" I hope, Miss Somers, you will excuse Eunice's little errors of speech, and German idioms. She is not very practised in English at present."

" What a pretty, flowing name Eunice is, Doctor !—so soft-sounding. Pray leave Fraülein von Bunsen with us, to-day. She shall correct our German, and we her English."

" Not to-day, thank you : she is like a new toy to me ; having only arrived last week, I can scarce spare her yet."

" But you *must* spare her to come and see me very often. I am sure we shall be excellent friends."

The young girl coloured with pleasure at Mabel's kind words.

As the Doctor took leave, he drew Mabel aside, and placing a sealed packet in her hand, said, " Read that before you come to the Moat. A little while back I should have hesitated to lay bare such a thing to you ; but *now* I have no fear,—none. Come, Eunice."

But Mabel had yet to kiss her, and said, as she did so, "Your papa and mine had a many years' friendship; and it will not be my fault if their daughters are strangers to each other."

A rapid glance passed between the Doctor and Mrs. Abney. 'Twas the first time since his loss they had heard Mabel mention her father's name, without a necessity for so doing; and then, always was it accompanied by such a subdued voice, and sad, sorrowful expression.

"I have not heard of any homœopathic miracles lately," said the Doctor, putting in his head again at the door, after bidding adieu.

"Come back, and I will tell you some."

"Thank you kindly; but I'll not trouble you, as I shouldn't believe one of them."

Remembering some words which once fell from the Doctor's lips, Mabel felt wonderfully curious about the packet he had left with her—it might probably elucidate them; so she at once settled herself to the perusal, and did not rise from her chair till she had finished reading the Doctor's story.

"You are aware, my dear Miss Somers," he commenced, "that your honoured and lamented father and myself first became acquainted at Heidelberg, where I was a matriculated student. How the acquaintance, which

ripened into such enduring friendship, was formed, you have *not* known. I am about to tell you.

“ I had been at the University some time, when I was introduced to a very agreeable family in the neighbourhood. The acquaintance soon ripened into intimacy; for it chanced to be in my power to serve them materially, and they professed deep gratitude. Their eldest daughter was, to my thinking, the loveliest creature I had ever looked on; she was the very beau-idéal of my fancy. If I might but call her mine—if they would but give her to me—bountifully should I be repaid; and so I told them. They called her in, told her of my spoken words, and their cordial approval, and left me to plead my suit with her.

“ I *did* plead, as I suppose all lovers whose heart and soul are living in their words, *do* plead. She was strangely agitated; but I hoped—believed it to be the gentle stir and tumult of responsive affection, ruffling the hitherto calm-flowing current of her sweet maiden thoughts; and I left her not till I held her promise for my wife: her hand was clasped in mine—we were betrothed.

“ A serene, quiet, very feminine exterior had Eunice von Wehland; she was young, and

exceedingly pretty ; of a timid spirit, guileless and simple-minded ; her voice, and every look and movement, bespoke gentleness and sweet temper.

“ The time was not far distant when I was to leave Heidelberg—leave it to prepare a home for her I idolized. Every day did she seem to become more the innermost of my soul : in bonds of gentle witchcraft did she hold me. Much were we together, wandering amid the exquisite scenery which surrounds the city. How happy a lover was I ! all things feeding, ministering to my passion ! The very trouble depicted on Eunice’s cheek, at times, gave fuel to it : the paining thought of leaving all her dear ones for a distant hearth, I knew, gave birth to it ; and I knew that by *that* hearth I could and would, by deepest tenderness, make up for all—yes, for all—to whom she must soon say, Farewell.

“ But I honoured my divinity the more for this clinging to her home and friends—this stedfast love for those who had sustained her childhood. To me, she was not simply woman, lovely and beloved ; she was of a higher nature than my own—more delicate ; an angel companion, fine and pure, lent to me ; a comforter—a gladdener of my days and years to be.

“ We had one day rambled to a beautiful village embosomed in the Odenwald ; ’twas a day of overflowing happiness to *me*, till on our return Eunice suddenly became very pale, looked fatigued, ill ; and said she felt so. I took her home, and desired her to go at once to her room and to bed ; and told her, gaily, that I should be up with the lark, to inquire after the health of my precious one ; and that I should not readily forgive myself for having allowed her to incur so much fatigue.

“ It was high summer, and somewhat late in the evening ; I threw aside my books, and strolled to the Castle gardens, to watch the setting sun,—as I could not be with *her*, ’twas pleasant and soothing to stand where she often stood with me,—in pomp and glory did it descend behind the Alsatian hills. Night fell, and still I lingered mid the soft, almost holy silence, unbroken save by the passionate melody of nightingales, pouring from the thickets, and the whispering of Linden trees, as the gentle midsummer breeze sighed through them.

“ It grew late, and the moon rose high, showering down her silvery light upon the rippling Neckar, as it winded through the valley, and throwing the magnificent ruins of

the Castle into beautiful repose and harmony, by its solemn breadth of light and shadow. My conscience was pretty clear, my heart was light, and as I paced the broad green terrace, I repeated to myself the fragment of a *Bursché* song,—

“ Now, by the dim lamp’s feeble light
Perchance upon thy bed to-night,
Thy thoughts to thy belov’d are given,
With nightly prayer for him to heaven.”

“ So lovely was the scene, that I still lingered, even when the clock in the Giant’s Tower pealed twelve; one after another the city clocks chimed out, and were re-echoed by those of the distant villages in the Rhine plain and the calm-lying Odenwald, a farther and still farther reach of sound.

“ One more gaze upon the Neckar, lying steeped in light, and I would go. My foot was turning to depart, when it was suddenly arrested by the sound of a fierce, wrathful voice, proceeding from a portion of the gardens densely planted, and not far from me. Not my way was it to play the eaves-dropper, and I should at once have moved away, had not the words, which only indistinctly reached me, seemed to convey a threat to life.

“ Again the voice rose, and I heard perfectly

what was said. Some man was well-nigh mad with jealousy. He threatened to strike; nay, he said he knew not what hindered him from killing some unhappy creature who stood quailing before him, and whose heart-breaking sobs alone replied to him. Once or twice, indeed, she attempted to speak, but her voice was instantly drowned in a torrent of bitter and most vehement reproach. Words that would burn into a woman's soul, names the most galling to a woman's ear, were hurled at, heaped on her.

“ ‘To think that I should be thus phrensied for thee; *for thee*—thou creature of wile and wickedness; thou that hast been luring on one to marry thee, thou painted snake, whilst troth-plighted to another; putting up thyself to barter and to sale to the highest bidder. Why didst thou not go into the market-place and make proclamation of thyself, take thy stand and call, “ Who'll buy? who'll buy?” ’

“ ‘But punished shalt thou be; the sun shall shine down upon thy disgrace, and show it in all its horribleness; shamed and left to thine own false heart; may it bid thee gird thyself with sackcloth, and pour ashes on thine head. Away, thou deceiving minion, thou shalt not kneel, my heart is utterly steeled against thee.’ ”

"Abjectly did the agonized creature plead for mercy, that he would hear her: with choking cries and moans, she besought that furious jealousy to listen: she threw herself upon her knees, but all in vain: the man was mad with the wrong he had suffered, or imagined.

"*'Love thee again—love thee!'*" he said, with a frightful sardonic laugh; *'tis* probable, surely. Why, I should need the eyes of Argus to watch thy goings out and comings in, to note if thy cheek paled or flushed when another's eye upon thee rested. This man, whom thou hast with thy guile and serpentry lured into love, would still be in life, and he would come, and I should find his kisses on thy lips, as I do now. Then—*then* I should kill thee without a word. This very night I did think to slay thee; but thou canst go, I will not harm thee. Go, begone, I am a-weary of talking with thee, thou fair, unrighteous daughter of falsehood and deceit."

"Again was her voice heard in piteous supplication.

"*'Tis* all in vain, I tell thee: from thee is my heart turned and barred up for ever. I know thee no longer: to a pure and modest maiden was I betrothed. O *'tis* such as thou

that make men wicked, scoffers at truth and honesty, unblushing profligates: and when thou hearest that I am become base and reckless, know that it is *thy* doing, *thy* work, Eunice von Wehland.'

"Strangely familiar to me had sounded the female voice, changed though it was by the agony thrilling in its tones; but I drove the suspicion back—*it could not be*. But *the* name, *her* name, was spoken by that stern and wrathful man; and I was stricken blind and deaf, and rooted to the ground. I was wakened by a frightful impulse tugging at my heart, which bade me—the tempter, who comes to man in the awful hour when reason totters, grows unsteady, was busy with me.

" 'He will forgive her *when thou art dead*. Let her be happy,' was whispered. 'What hast *thou* to live for now? hast aught, hast love, hast hope? *She may* be happy when thou art gone; but for thee, thy lamp is shattered, its light lies in the dust. Life is but a spark. Death is eternal rest,' said the all-evil one.

"I succumbed to the tempter (my brain was on fire); down I rushed to where the still river lay so calmly sleeping (heeding not that in my mad, reckless course, I ran against and

knocked down, some one chancing to stand in my blind path to destruction); in I threw myself, where I knew the stream to be swiftest, deepest, with a sort of rejoicing and exulting insanity. But little more do I remember, save that I struggled desperately with some one who was trying to save me. —

“There is a blank in my existence for some time after this. When delirium left me, I found myself in bed in my own room, where a stranger, young, handsome, and of commanding presence, was sitting reading; he looked up, and, seeing my wondering gaze, came forward with the most winning and assuring smile, to tell me that I must not speak, save to express my wants and wishes; he had written to my friends, he said, and he doubted not they would soon be with me.

“I could not thank him, I was too weak; and I was *not* thankful for renewed existence. That stranger was your father; then on his homeward way from long travel in Southern Europe; but one night had he contemplated spending in Heidelberg. He it was, wandering about the Castle ruins by moonlight, whom I had ran against with so much violence in my rapid descent into the valley: he it was who, believing me to be a loosened maniac,

had followed, plunged in—no human eye save his on me—and saved me from self-destruction, against my will. He had watched beside me when life hung by a thread; much he had learned from my wild ravings; but I soon told him all; and like a brother did he enter into my grief, pointing out, as mind and body gathered strength, all that life still held for me to strive for. He saw Eunice and her parents—even now, when so many years have passed, well do I remember the wild heart-throb it gave me, when he said, ‘he thought Eunice had not been *so much* to blame; she was of such a timid, shrinking spirit, that she durst not oppose her parents when they insisted on her giving up her troth-plight with Paul von Bunsen—whom she had loved from childhood—and accepting her richer English suitor. Still less did she dare tell von Bunsen; he was of such a fiery and impetuous nature; that she trembled with fear at the thought of his discovering how matters stood; so she had continued her correspondence with him on its accustomed footing, putting off the evil day of explanation, which she knew must needs come, sooner or later.

“ When their betrothal was sanctioned, they had, during his visits, been in the habit of

walking much together. He had written to inform her of his probable arrival in Heidelberg, and requested her to meet him at an accustomed spot—‘Under the sunset tree, that they might renew their vows,’ he said.

“The letter had never reached her—been intercepted.

“The day he had specified was the one she and I had rambled together into the Odenwald. We had, in returning, passed the very place where he was impatiently waiting her presence. He saw us, and she saw him; hence her pale looks.

“His hot, ill-governed blood flamed up till he was ready to destroy her in his jealous fury.

“I never saw Eunice again; she was married to the man she most undoubtedly loved the day after I quitted Heidelberg for ever.

“Your father and I travelled for some time. A sullen loathing of my life had come upon me, and he would not leave me; for long my mind was *very* sick.

“You will now, perhaps, understand how it is I have never married. My temple of felicity was so rudely dashed to the ground, that it was impossible the fragments could again re-unite into a structure. I had done with

the fever and fret of life. Peace came ; but it was after a great battle. The ambition I had cherished was all gone. I lost my youth, and have never again found it. That I have become an oddity, I know quite well—not unhappy, far from it. In my books, my microscope, and my profession, have centred the interests that men commonly give to wife and children.

“ I should tell you, that always twice in the year I received tidings of *her* (Madame von Bunsen)—through your father they came. Her mild, gentle nature has been abundantly tried with her husband’s most stormy, passionate one ; but I understand she loved him devotedly to the last, and sorrowed deeply when she lost him suddenly in a duel. One of her children—she has three—is coming to live with me, my adopted daughter.

“ Madame von Bunsen is my Presentee to the Memorial.

“ I have told you this long story because your father had much to do with it. I know with what absorbing interest you regard everything in which he was concerned. I was bound to him for life, you may be sure. Though I should scarce have ventured to lay open the page in which is writ this love-fever of my youth—romance of my life, as it has

been—had you not felt the omnipotence of the passion. It is like the opening of a new sense, bringing into the range of personal knowledge a totally fresh region of thoughts and feelings that have hitherto slumbered and slept.

“With some they no doubt sleep from birth to death; but I envy them not—indeed *I envy them not.*”

“Much inclined do I feel to ride off upon the old theme—the necessity of love—but it is needless; inasmuch as you have succumbed to that necessity, and would, doubtless, say with me—

“‘O God, we thank Thee, that, to the gift of Life, Thou didst add Love!’”

CHAPTER II.

"She is indeed too happy to be glad."

KEATS.

Look at Mabel Somers as she sits in her boudoir, bending over a love-laden letter, rapt, lost in tranced stillness. How full of natural and most unconscious grace is her whole attitude, and flowing outlined figure, as her soft crimson cheek resting on her dimpled hand, she reads again, and yet again! What a depth of exquisite joy lies in the smile which mantles, as her deep azure eyes trace each love-breathing word, and in the quick sigh with which she clasps the letter to her lips and bosom, and most passionately kisses it!

The year had waned ere Wymonde returned to Beechwood. Lady Barry's illness had been a most serious one, but she was now recovering well enough to smilingly bid him—"Go back to his Mabel—well had he acquitted himself of his duty—she would now spare him."

Very calm and quiet was Mabel on the day fixed for his return—steadily bending over

her embroidery (that ill-used magnolia was now set right, and glowing finely on the canvas), the shading of a blue passion flower so engrossed her, that she scarce spoke, or, indeed, heard when she was spoken to—the gracious Mabel was positively uncompanionable.

It was a most wintry day. The snow slanted down noiselessly in densest flakes, paining the eye by the ceaseless rapidity with which they fell. The roads would be well-nigh impassable if it went on for twenty-four hours.

“I shall order dinner for eight o’clock, instead of seven, to-night, Mabel,” said Liliass, quietly; “Mr. Barry will be certain to have arrived by that time, *if* the trains can pass at all.”

Mabel thanked her demurely, and looked out upon the snow, and talked about its incomparable whiteness, and beautiful effect upon the trees and shrubs; and promised the children that there should be a terrific snow-giant made, as large as a son of Anak, as soon as the snow ceased falling.

And Liliass laughed quizzically, almost satirically at hearing her talk in this way, when she was expecting her lover, and said something in an under tone about “dissembling,”

which made the gracious Mabel colour. Liliás was really an abominable tease.

It was one of the comfortable practices of Beechwood to have tea carried in to the library an hour before dinner, for all or any that liked to take it. It was just drank *sans* ceremony, sitting, standing, kneeling at the fire, or any other fashion that pleased you best.

Liliás's fashion was to plant her dainty feet (which you never saw encased in other than satin or velvet,) upon the fender, whilst wrapped in a shawl of eider-down, she reclined back in the most luxurious of chairs; scented flowers would be either in her lap, or her hand, or at her *ceinture*, if scented flowers were to be had, and so she would sip her tea, gossiping the while with her husband, or any one else, that was like herself, inclined for tea-drinking and gossiping: she occasionally got so engrossed with the indolent enjoyment of the hour, that dinner was kept waiting whilst she hurriedly dressed; very certain was she, when this was the case, of a smart rebuke from Charles, which she always met with apologies, pouting, laughing, and promising amendment all in a breath.

"She knew it was inexcusable, shameful,—but, but she really had no idea it was so late."

"With a clock before your eyes, and a watch at your side, ha, Lillas!—I do believe if your maid did not come to remind you, that you would sit perfectly unconcerned till bedtime."

"I do think I should, Charles. I'm quite sure I never hear the dressing bell, but it shall not be the case again, so no more scolding this time, please!"

Intensely idle she looked on the evening of Mr. Barry's expected return, as she sat over the blazing fire, teacup in hand, chatting with Mrs. Abney and Charles, as to the probability of his not reaching Beechwood before the morrow, the trains must be so much delayed by the depth of snow upon the rails.

"Well, I do hope he'll come! I can see Mabel does not know what to do with herself. Hark! *that is* him," Lillas exclaimed, as a dull, muffled sound of carriage wheels was heard, then suddenly stopped, and the doorbell pealed loudly. She jumped up, all her indolence gone at once. The door quickly opened, and there came the sound of voices in the vestibule, inquiries, answers, and then advancing steps towards the library.

It *was* him. Hearty and cordial was the greeting on both sides, and then his eye

travelled round the room as if he expected to see some other *one* playing bo-peep from under the littered table, or standing up, as a sort of living folio, upon the book-shelves.

A look of keen disappointment, then a hasty, almost troubled glance towards Liliás.

"*Where is she*, Mrs. Ferrand?"

Almost was she tempted to give him a teasing answer, but something whispered her that just *then* it would be really too bad; so she mastered the mischievous impulse, and said—

"'Tis not ten minutes since she was here; she is fully expecting you,—has been counting the minutes, I *do* believe. When you have thawed yourself, and drank some tea, I will take you to her."

"Now, if you please, dear Mrs. Ferrand," was the prompt, eager reply.

She rose, with a laugh; and whilst saying something about his *extraordinary* impatience, led the way up the broad stairs to Mabel's drawing-room; ruddy light streamed from the half-opened door; with a smile and expressive gesture, Liliás pointed to it, and with womanly tact and consideration, left him to enter alone.

He did enter; his footfall unheard on the

thick, downy pile of the rich velvet carpet. Mabel was standing with her back to the door, with a book outspread on the marble mantelpiece; yet she was not reading; her whole attitude was expressive of listening—evidently was her ear drinking in every sound.

“Is there no welcome for me, Mabel Somers?” was questioned, in a deep, love-fraught voice. With a sudden start, which caused her book to fall, she turned and met his impatient and impassioned gaze.

Vivified and radiant grew her look on the instant; with soft, half-inarticulate murmurs, —with flushing, fluttering, yet most irrepressible joy, she bounded to him—aye, right into his arms.—

Many weeks went by ere Ruth Collins regained her strength; depressed in mind, and enfeebled in body, she continued long. A stray one of the flock, and as such to be tenderly led back to the fold, Mr. Geary and Mr. Abney considered her; and frequent the conversations they held with her. Shame seemed to lie festeringly at her heart; her eyes were always filling with vain tears; her spirit, broken—crushed.

At length a Sabbath came, when she thought

her strength would serve her to attend church. The service was over, but she lingered with her mother in the porch. A message had been brought to them by Miss Somers's page that they were there to wait. So faded and changed was Ruth, from the merry-eyed, blooming girl she was a year back, that none, save for her mother's companionship, would have known her.

She never raised her eyes as one and another passed without a word of inquiry, (though all knew that she had been rescued from the very jaws of death). A scornful sort of look was fixed upon her, by some who had never gone astray; clothed from head to feet in conscious virtue, well might they disdain sin and frailty, and gaze with lofty eyes upon the cowering, trembling sinner.

Again the sound of coming feet, and shadows glanced along the wall, fell upon the stone pavement, and there rested; whilst a voice, low, soft in accent as rarest music, spoke, and Ruth looked up to meet a smile full of sweetness and most pitying kindness.

Home to the poor stricken heart it went, like sudden sunshine in a valley of desolation; and there sprung up hope and strength once more. Yes, strength and brave power of

effort, to strive, to make the Future efface the Past, as if it had not been ; courage to face her position, to surmount the icy wall, misconduct had builded up between her and her fellows—determination to win back her good name—to win it back again.

Mabel, who had not seen her since that sad revealment at Beechwood, was shocked at the change in her ; she was so worn and faint, and overcome, as her lips moved, in vain efforts to syllable forth thanks for all the care that had hovered about her, all the comforts lavished upon her throughout the long, wearying time of illness, when it seemed that she scarce could be raised up again.

But dumb she was ; naught would her lips do, save quiver uncontrollably ; and Mabel, seeing her agony of emotion, turned to the widow to speak a few most kind and gentle words relative to her—

Any who had seen the girl walking home, leaning on her mother, and moving with such a feeble, tottering step, would have thought she was weeping from sore heart-trouble ; that probably some mocking, taunting words had met her ear, and done their intended work of laceration.

But what is it she is saying ?

“ I could lay down my life for her, this very day, and joy in it. Such a lady as she is, and hanging on her lover’s arm, to think of me, and come to speak to me there before all the people ! Oh, mother ! mother ! if I couldn’t cry it would kill me ! ”

Very tenderly did the widow lay Ruth down upon her bed, when they reached the neat cottage home (for, all tenderness and motherly love was she to her now, she would have faced the whole world in behalf of her ashamed child), and Ruth drew *her* down too, and laid her head, as she had done when an infant, on her mother’s breast, with her white, thin fingers pressing the mother’s hand, and saying—

“ Oh, Mother—mother ! if I had never left you, I should not have grown old in my youth, as I have done, nor have made your brown hair turn silver white ; but if God spares my life, I will be a comfort to you yet, my mother.

“ I’ve never, since my trouble came, wished to live—night and day I’ve prayed that I mightn’t (I always believed that God would have mercy on me when I was so wretched and so sorry for my fault, and that I had lived too long when I had brought shame on her that bore me) ; but to-day, mother, I feel changed—feel

that I shall get better, that I should like to do, that I may win back my character, and make up to you for all the sorrow I have laid upon you. I can do it, and I will; God and our young lady will help me, and you'll stand by and give me heartsome words, and such a pleasant smile as is shining over your whole face now.—And now, mother, kiss me, and let me sleep, for I am tired and weary, though fresh life and spirit have poured into my heart this day."

The Memorial being now quite completed, was opened for the reception of its inmates early in the year. The Beechwood party, with Mabel's solicitor, and of course Wymonde,—nothing now could she proceed with without her lover,—he must share her responsibility,—help her to bear her burdens, be her conscience-keeper, adviser, ruler, head,—were assembled in its large centre room, to receive the presentees.

First came the Gearys, introducing their Presentee, Lady Williamson, the widow of a late Court Physician; Mrs. Yorke, a former school-mate of Mrs. Abney's, was hers; Mrs. Norman, the widow of an Indian officer, was Miss Somers'; lastly, came Dr. Merridan with Madame von Bunsen leaning on his arm. An

expressive glance passed between him and Mabel; as she stepped quickly forward with her very brightest smile, to welcome the sweet, gentle-looking lady, who was clad in the deepest mourning weeds—the only one of the widows with the badge of widowhood. With great interest did she gaze at the fair, pensive face, which, faded though it was, bore ample testimony to its having been one of unusual beauty: dove-like was its character.

When all were seated, Mr. Walshe read aloud the Deed of Gift, which had been drawn out and prepared with all due legal formality; wherein Mabel Somers, by and with the consent of all parties concerned in it, made over certain lands and hereditaments for the keeping up of that Memorial for ever, and for the support and comfort of four widowed gentlewomen—its inmates.

This she had done in commemoration of her father, the late Adrian Somers, of Somerton; for the great love and tenderness she bore to him; and for the unchanging affection in which she should for ever hold his memory.

A simple code of regulations had been drawn up (in which both Charles and Wymonde had assisted Mabel's judgment), and the observance of which it was considered, would

tend to secure the general harmony of the little community. To this document each one of the presentees affixed her signature, and the legal portion of the business was over.

All knelt down whilst Mr. Geary offered up an eloquent prayer of consecration and thanksgiving.

They saw each Presentee in her own handsomely-arranged apartments, and then left them.

CHAPTER III.

"She scarce could leave a door, or enter in
Without a blessing on her." ROGERS.

GIRDLED with gladness now was Mabel, sun-steeped was her life, and with the most joyous *abandon* did she give herself up to its delights. In broadest, fullest contact with every happy thing was her existence; her most sweet and sunny temper made her see excellences in everything, and sheathed her as in golden panoply, from the minute fangs of those little vexations and annoyances which daily, hourly press upon, and assail us; over *her* they had no power, but blunted and pointless, rebounded from her.

Never could you come wrong to Mabel. Fitfulness or listlessness never pervaded that gracious nature of hers. "Far as the east is from the west," was she sundered from selfishness or sloth. Diligent, hopeful, gay-spirited, exquisitely balanced, whether she were overlooking the progress of a school, or listening to the "simple annals" of the poor, or making

one of the peopled hearth of Beechwood, or joining the song or dance, or with soul-lit eyes whispering with thee, O lover ; ever was she the same smiling, radiant being, in whose fair soul was hymning a very spirit-song of blessedness.

What more could be asked for her than she possessed ? The brightest health, graceful and exquisite beauty, loving and loved with the most devoted and engrossing passion, almost idolized by her people ; in her hands such wide power to bless and benefit others. Could aught more be asked for her ? Nothing absolutely. Happiness filled her young heart in all its lonely chambers—it rested on her fair brow like sunshine lying on water.

Yet, had she still a wish. Hark to its utterance to her lover, as they stand together gazing at a rich sunset on a balmy eve ; yet every minute their glances mingling, turning from the heavens to each other.

“ Would that life could stand still with me now, Wymonde ; it is so complete, so perfect. Time pause, and let me not grow older, never can I be happier.”

“ And do *you*, who vow you love me, say this ? ” asked Wymonde, as a quick, slight

shade of displeasure passed across his expressive face.

Her laugh chimed out, it must be confessed, saucily, and the lover, fixing earnest eyes upon her, demurred to both the wish and the laugh; discourse he did right eloquently, and met that nonsensical wish with another, that "time would fly more quickly withal," for, though happy now, none happier, is she not his own?—yet—yet still *more* his own she will be. Ah! haste ye, haste ye days and years, and give her to his longing heart for ever and for ever.

The months passed on—it was now June; and a large dinner party was assembled at the Rectory to meet and welcome Mr. Abney, who was expected home that day. Early in February he had left England for the Holy Land. Sorely against his will did he go. He remonstrated, reasoned, affirmed that he was well, needed no change whatever. All was in vain. Choice was given him as to where he would bend his steps. No more.

The day of his return was made almost a gala-day in Somerton, his name was on every lip, all were eager to see him again, and see him strong and well, as he described himself to be in his letters, which had gone the

round of the parish. With the most absorbing interest had he seemed to tread in the earthly footsteps of our Lord.

“Do you hear the sound of wheels, love?” inquired good Mrs. Geary of the Rector. She had put the questions some half-dozen times previously.

Beautiful exceedingly was it to see the way in which they both regarded Philip. Not a shadow of jealousy seemed to find room in their minds, of him who was to stand in Mr. Geary’s place, when he himself was gathered into the spiritual garner.

The dinner hour passed, and still he came not. Calm, placid Mrs. Geary looked quite perturbed; she played with her rings, and pinched and plaited her satin dress, in an irresistible desire to be doing something, she scarce knew what. She at last sat down by Mabel; they, of course, conversed about Philip, and in so doing, the kind lady grew less fidgetty and anxious.

“He is like a son to us, my dear; indeed, if any one *could* supply our lost William’s place, it would be him. So considerate, and gentle, and kind, not only to us, but to every one. It is his nature. You do not remember our son, my dear, I know; he left the neigh-

bourhood whilst you were quite a little girl. Nothing could dissuade him from entering the army. A sore trial it was to us, but we bless'd him, and let him go. His regiment was ordered to India. A woful day was it for us when we knew. But a more woful one was coming. Our brave William fell in the Khyber Pass. One blood-stained lock of hair—it was dark brown—was all that came back to us of our son. His servant saw him fall, and just cut off one single lock of hair. Yes, my dear, him I had travailed for, and nursed at my bosom, and kissed a thousand times, lay mouldering in the Khyber Pass.—I thought my husband's heart *would* break; in the day he toiled incessantly: he besought his friends all round the neighbourhood to let him take their places in the pulpit, or on the platform; what they were going to do, to let him do for them, to keep his mind from thinking of our dead son. But, my dear, in the night his grief was sure to find him out. Sleep he could not, the power of it went away from him, so he used to arise and pray. I kneeled beside him hour after hour, night after night. There was no earthly help for trouble like to ours; only God *could* give us patience and comfort, and He did in His good time."

Tight grew her grasp of Mabel's hand, which she had taken in her own, and her face, usually so serene and untroubled, showed as in a mirror, that she had sounded untold depths of anguish.

"But, my dear, I should not tell you a sad story like that, now. I think I heard wheels, did you?"

Yes, nearer, nearer came the sound, there was no mistake. A carriage swept rapidly round the shrubbery, and drew up at the door. A well-known voice spoke in the lobby, and half the assembled party disappeared from the room, straight away. There seemed a prodigious bustle, hand shaking, and welcoming, in the midst of which *he* entered the drawing room, where the ladies came forward in a body to greet him. Mrs. Geary and Mrs. Abney kissed his cheek, Mabel put her two hands into his, and uttered but one word, and that was, "Philip."

Before he had gone the round of them all, the bells clanged out a joyful peal. He was well-nigh overcome, and said, "In no way was he prepared for such a welcome as he had received,—he was wholly undeserving of it."

Mr. Ferrand jocosely agreed with him, inasmuch as he had come home alone; they had

all been hoping that he would not return without some Rachel or Rebecca to introduce to them, and claim their good offices for—”

“ I’m sworn to celibacy, Mr. Ferrand,” replied he, his cheek, sunburn’d as it was, perceptibly colouring.

“ Then, ladies, I give him up to your tender mercies. It is either a deep insult to the sex, none are worthy, or else he is a Romish Priest in disguise—perhaps, a Jesuit.”

“ I am afraid you will find no friends with that avowal on your lips,” said the Doctor, who was seated beside the gentle Madame von Bunsen.

“ I cannot say I approve of a single life,” observed Lady Williamson; “ for the clergy particularly.”

“ It is setting an evil example to the parish to hold marriage in contempt,” added Mrs. Norman.

“ Even the Patriarchs took wives,” said Lilius.

“ Nay, some of them had two or more,” put in Mr. Ferrand.

The way the jest was followed up was enough to irritate the best saint in the Romish Calendar.

“ Do come and sit beside me, Philip, and

turn a deaf ear to all their impertinence," said Mabel, who saw that he was grievously annoyed with this *badinage*. So, as Wymonde was in town, he kept his seat beside her for the evening, describing the deeply interesting scenes through which he had passed, and telling of many agreeable incidents of travel—many pleasant and stirring adventures.

The Doctor fell into a state of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic ecstasy, from which he did not recover for long, with his first view of the Theban mummy, which Mr. Abney had brought for him. All the wise people around were invited to assist at its unrolling, and immense interest was excited by the mortuary curiosity, of which the Doctor talked incessantly to Madame and Fraülein von Bunsen.

When the public wonder was somewhat abated, the embalmed Egyptian was lodged in a windowed mahogany case, and placed in the entrance-hall of the Moat, confronting everybody who placed foot there. The Doctor introduced him to his friends as a gentleman of at least four thousand years old, who, for aught he knew to the contrary, had been cup-bearer to one of the Cleopatras.

CHAPTER IV.

"The grey wing of Time hath pass'd and paused not
O'er this stately English home."

"You *must* find time to go with me to Bulegh Court, Mabel. I want to know your wishes relative to the alterations. It is time they were begun with, as we shall now soon be married," said Wymonde.

"Soon? Do you know my age, Sir, that I am but nineteen this month? By the way, I mean to have it held a high holiday in Somerton, nothing but bell-ringing and feasting from morn till night; there shall be no work done on my birthday, I am determined."

"And how is the day to be kept two years hence, being marriage-day, as well as birthday?" asked he, with a smiling glance.

Mabel's colour mounted, and she said, with a little pettish air—

"Not one word will I hear upon *that* subject; highly impudent, I call it, to even hint at such a thing." She leaned her face quite close to Wymonde's—"I have really so much

to do, am *so* occupied, that I believe *I never shall find time to be married.*"

Her eyes were positively dancing with fun and glee as she said it.

How he answered the challenge it is needless to tell. Some little time elapsed before the chat went on again in the quiet fashion which it ought to do.

"Let me go now," exclaimed Mabel, as the dressing-bell rang whilst they were still loitering.

"But one moment. Then, I shall ask Mr. Ferrand this evening about our going to Bulegh, (sadly does it need caring for;) I believe the people are half savage; and you have Somerton in such beautiful order, that I must look to my laurels a little."

"I will go with you, *if* Cousin Charles approves, and not, if he does not, of course, my Vine-propp Elme, which is the name I more particularly mean to call you by. Now, do let me go! What will Charles say if I keep dinner waiting?"

—Far from the sound of city stir, or Minster chime, lay Bulegh Court. Still, peaceful, almost solitary did it seem—a grave grand old place, full of old-world beauty, and massive picturesque grace. The mansion, with

its surrounding estate, had been bequeathed by the Hon. Lady Wymonde to her grandson, Wymonde Barry, the second son of her eldest daughter, the Hon. Lady Johanna Barry. It had remained uninhabited since Lady Wymonde's death, (some fifteen years before,) save by servants, and a fussy, bustling old housekeeper. No longer was it still, the solitary place was glad with children's joyous cries; with the hum of many voices; the echoes of gay laughs—the sound of many footsteps; all the party from Beechwood was there: children and all must go with Mabel to see her home that was to be.

The approach to Bulegh was by a magnificent lime avenue, which terminated only at the gateways of enscrolled iron-work. The house was built of dark grey stone, softened, yet no way mouldered by the hand of time; of a large and imposing exterior, quadrangular in form. The southern declivity on which it stood, sloped gently down in front to a beautiful and extensive sheet of water; but, at the back of the house rose, till, in the purple distance, the eminences swelled into deep-rooted hills, whose summits looked to mingle with the clouds.

Trees of amazing girth and growth—sum-

mered and wintered had they there for centuries—were scattered up and down the noble park, or grouped together in rich but overgrown masses of foliage, on which the eye loved to rest, and under which the graceful fallow deer stood gazing upon the unwonted intruders, or trooped away in alarm at their approach.

The terraced gardens were reached by broad flights of steps, and intersected by dense hedges of yew, laurel, and lavender, which, with the abundant topiary work, gave them a peculiarly quaint formal appearance. Prim flowerbeds, frescades, fountains, bowers, placed in the most plummet and line fashion, added to this effect, which was far from unpleasing. Everything in and about the house breathed of the olden time.

“Water—water everywhere, at beautiful Bulegh!” said Mabel, as she stood by the side of the fish-ponds, which were fed by perennial springs. Water, indeed, abounded, its pleasant murmur was never lost.

Of noble, majestic proportions was the entrance-hall; sculptured marble pillars ran up to the lofty ceiling from the marble floor; over them fell soft rich gloom from deeply-coloured windows, filled with heraldic embla-

zonries. Branching off from the hall on one side, was a magnificent banqueting-room.

"What shall we do with *this* room, Wymonde?" asked Mabel; "there must have been princely hospitality exercised to require such a room as this."

"I suppose there was, love. My mother is wearying to tell you all about the ancient glories of her house; *when* will you go to her, Mabel? she would have come to you long ere this, had her health permitted."

"Ask Cousin Charles whether I may go this summer; I should very much like to do. Are these all ancestors of your mother's?"

"All of them, I believe, my darling."

With eager interest did Mabel examine the portraits in a long picture-gallery they had entered.

"I see where you get your stately air from, *monarque*," she exclaimed. "What sweet calm-looking creatures these are! and what histories they must have had! though they look quite too dignified, I should say, to be wooed and won by mortal men."

"Would you have them wooed and won by angels, child?" he asked, with a smile.

"I don't quite know—that is, I think they should go to heaven without being breathed

on by mortal passion. But who is this? what an exquisite creature!"

Strangely beautiful was the face which so attracted her; large, soft, dark eyes, of indescribable expression looked at you through wildering auburn curls, which, mingled with jewels, fell down to the very waist. Perfect were the features and the *contour*; the archest, most bewitching smile was wreathing the lips.

"That is Lady Janet Wymonde," he answered.

"And what was her history? for I am sure she *must* have had one, Wymonde."

"She had, and a very sad one."

"Will you tell it to me now? I never saw any face so peculiarly lovely."

"I have seen only one that excels it," said Wymonde, as he fixed a glance upon her. "Mabel, Mabel, why do you blush so, my darling?"

"Wymonde, you grow very insolent, very."

"Some other time he would tell her Lady Janet's history," he said: but Mabel returned again and again, to gaze upon the arch and lovely face.

Long did the betrothed pair linger in the gallery; he intently gathering wishes from her lips as to what she would have done—what

alterations made, so as to render Bulegh a bright and fitting bower for her abode.

"Did your mother spend her early life here? Was she wooed, and married, and a' at Bulegh?"

"She was, my Mab; and still thinks there is no place like it."

"Then, dear Wymonde, do not modernise it too much, or she will be pained when she comes to visit us, and finds it so different to her former home. No home *can* be like the first."

Over his face passed the quick, slight glance which Mabel now began to understand so well—interpret so truly; down went her lips upon his hand.

"Let *that* be writ in water; mean it I did not in the sense which you have taken it. *O mon roi*, forgive me!"—

On one room did she place her seal—changed it must not be in the slightest particular; she would have it for her own *boudoir*, and a beautiful one it would be. It fronted the rising sun—boldest, yet finest carving of flowers and fruit, ran round its cheerful walls—from the two low, deep, bay windows, you stepped into a gay *parterre*, in whose centre lay a gem-like pool and fountain—at the top of the gently-sloping bank of turf, which encom-

passed the sweet sanctuary, was a light stone balustrading, with pedestals, on which quaint urns were placed for flowers and graceful shrubs."

"Sacred to herself must that room be," said Mabel: "she was not even sure that she should accord right of entrance to him who stood beside her," she added demurely—"nay, she thought she would adopt the Turkish fashion of placing slippers at the door, she would have a pair carved in stone, permanently affixed over the doorway."

Wymonde laughed; and then, with an imperious and despotic air, defied her to do it.

So their love prate went on, as they explored the grave old place; threading long galleries, ascending and descending staircases—gazing from the windows upon a majestic sweep of country, or standing out upon the battlements, or laughing gaily as their feet slid upon floors of polished oak.

"There is no disputing that you are a gregarious creature, Mabel," said the lover, in reply to a question as to whether he would allow her to have the place—large as it was—always full of friends—not company, but friends; whole troops of them—his and hers, whom they loved.

"I will bind you to it *now*, Wymonde, because I suppose I must not expect always to find you with a lover's complaisance, must I?"

He would not promise, unless she gave up the stone slippers; "but she could not, indeed, yield that point," she said.

The clergyman from the village of Bulegh, the Rev. Mr. Franklyn, joined them at dinner; a man, dull, heavy, spiritless in the extreme—"sworn brother to an owl," Liliás irreverently whispered Mabel. A deplorable account did he give of the condition of the village. He preached to empty pews, he said, for nearly all the people were Dissenters—Wesleyans, Mormons, Ranters,—anything but Church-loving people; indeed, they were little better than heathens: very few of them could read or write. There had been excellent schools during the lifetime of Lady Wymonde, but since the Court had been uninhabited, they had fallen quite into neglect. He himself was a single man, with very delicate health; and he was so disgusted with the dissent on every side, that he ceased to take any notice of the parishioners—left them entirely now to themselves.

"Well, Sir, we must strive to bring about a better state of things," said Wymonde,

cheerfully ; "I am afraid the fault lies very much at my door."

"I do not see what can be done, with this horrid dissent meeting you at every wind and turn," said Mr. Franklyn, with a depressing air, as he rose up to go, being afraid of the damp evening air.

"O for a Philip Abney at Bulegh!" cried Mabel ; "though I fear there is but one such in all England's length and breadth."

"As there is but one Mabel Somers," whispered the lover,—

"Or one Vine-propp Elme," she whispered back.

Wymonde proposed a walk to the lake, as the evening was so balmy and still ; and the ladies, throwing on bonnets and shawls in very gipsy-like fashion, were speedily ready to set out ; some little difficulty was experienced in getting Lillas beyond the old terraced garden, so enchanted was she with the rose scents that filled it, from the wild, overgrown clumps, all covered with richest bloom.

How the beautiful lake sparkled in the sunset glow ! it was a noble sheet of water, to which all the bubbling springs around made haste to pay their tribute. Gentle declivities of softest green sloped down to the basin, and

bold tree-limbs gazed at their own reflection; and leafy branches nodded to their shadows in the clear, bright mirror—its beauty enhanced a thousand fold by the numberless white lily-cups floating on its bosom, in whose fair and scented chalices, the red and saffron rays from the glorious western sky were lying prisoned: a small island—emerald on diamond, rose in the centre—'mid its sedges, flags, and rushes, did the white swan make its nest—the wild fowl hide.

“I must sketch that boat-house before we leave,” said Liliás. “I never saw one so effective and so picturesque.”

They lingered on the fair lake's banks, till the stars looked down into it, and the white ghost moth, flew abroad; then sauntered back through overgrown plantations, to the house. The night was so serene, and warm, and light, for the moon had risen, that Wymonde whispered Mabel to stay out with him just for a moon-light stroll.

“Please, dear *tante*, Liliás, Charles, may we linger out a little?” she asked, as they stood at the iron gates in the centre of the open screen of stone, which formed the fourth side of the Quadrangle.

“I am glad to see you have the grace to

blush, Miss Somers, whilst making such an unusual request," said Charles, putting on an austere look.

Of course permission was given, though coupled with many injunctions to be unboundedly grateful for such indulgence, and not to be out long.

He led her into a woodland path, where the light, for whispering lovers made, fell brokenly through the leaves and branches of great trees; slowly they paced on, scarce speaking—his face was bent down towards hers—hers uplifted to him—and as she smiled, she sighed—and even as she sighed, smiled again.

A gentle aura stirred; heaven's softest night-breeze struck upon the earthly lyre, and brought out sighing music, such as night only yields.

Again, the sound of hurrying waters, as they passed from underneath the trees into an open glade, where the moonlight broadly fell. In the centre of the glade stood a tree, a single wayfaring tree, spreading motherly arms. Five springs met underneath its shadow—into a large stone basin did the streams united flow, and from thence pursued their course by some underground channel to the lake. A low, ivy-covered wall bounded the place on

three sides: on the fourth, broad, but well-worn steps descended to where the waters gurgled and foamed noisily.

Mabel was delighted with it (as indeed she was with everything about Bulegh, she said). "Really! such a lovely combination as there was in that spot, she believed she had never seen."

"What a place to bring a book to, dear Wymonde."

"It is the very place to lie and dream through a summer's day, Mabel. But, lovely as it is, sadder tragedy never was acted than this place as seen. The Lady Janet, whom you so admired this morning, was found lying here, with her long auburn curls dyed in her own heart's blood."

"Is it a love story, Wymonde?" asked Mabel, as she shrunk closer to his side.

"It is—love, jealousy, murder."

"Will you tell it to me?"

"Let me tell you by daylight; in this solitary place, and at this hour, it would make you fear."

Full of woman's faith and trust were the dewy eyes that looked up into his. "What *could* I fear, with God above, and you beside me, Wymonde?"

"Never, surely never, spake such an angel tongue as yours, my Mabel."

Hand in hand they stood whilst he told her of love which grew side by side with despair—its twin-born—of jealousy, which turned the brain, and believed that, killing was no murder.

"But come, my love, come, and let us leave this haunted spot; your nerves are tender, not firm-strung enough for such a tale as this."

"Is it quite true?" she asked, with quick falling tears.

"It is quite. She lived four generations back from my mother, and perished when she was scarce nineteen."

Lady Janet was believed to haunt the spot, yet, unregarding, there did they linger, and talk to each other in lowest, gentlest tones; on her fair, sweet face did his eyes dwell with all the fervour of absorbing affection. They saw nothing, knew nothing, cared for nothing, save the other; their spirits thrilled with ecstasy of love.

"'Tis a marvel to me *how* I have won you, Mabel," he whispered; "how I have been so favoured of heaven. Did our souls love, wed, before this present existence, and,

living here, recognise each other again? Can it be that we are but carrying out the compact made in that other world amongst the angels? *Can* this be so?"

"*It must be so,*" came soft and slow from Mabel's lips, as her eyes uplifted from him to the heavens; "and in that other world will it live again, pure, and sweet, and fond as now. Wymonde, dear Wymonde, this beatitude of love is very heavenly, earthly though it be." —

Hastily did Mabel throw off her bonnet and shawl when they reached the house, and was hastening to join the party, but Wymonde called her back.

"How are the shoes, Mabel?"

"You have learned *that* from Aunt Abney. Not damp in the least; dry as dust, or as Mr. Franklyn's sermons would be."

"Child, I cannot take your word; let me feel them."

So as he kneeled down before her for the purpose, she busied herself with tendrilling his dark curling hair round her graceful fingers, whilst she said, in a feigned pettish voice,

"*Never* am I to be out of leading-strings about my health, I foresee. It is really preposterous to make me take so much care when

I am never ill ; never, even, have a cold. Am I to be a child all my life long ?”

“ Yes,” he said, as he rose up and prisoned the hand which had been playing pranks with his hair, and kissed it, till it was fairly crimsoned over. “ Now go and change your shoes.”

“ Ah ! I think I will not ; there is no need, dear Wymonde.”

He led her to the foot of the great staircase, told her to go change them at once, and come down again quickly.

A London architect arrived the next morning, with whom Wymonde and Mr. Ferrand were occupied in going over the house, and deciding on the requisite alterations. And whilst they were doing this, Mabel established herself in that pretty room (of which she affirmed she had already taken possession), and arranged her plans for the reformation of dissenting Bulegh (to which Liliás laughingly said she was sure a missionary must be sent,) and in the evening Wymonde noted them down from her dictation. Set about directly they were to be.

“ Well, what next after the schools, love ? ” he asked.

“ Make a huge festivity and merry-making

of your birthday, next month. Give the people an excellent dinner, and let them drink your health till the woods ring again. Set the banquetting-room apart for dancing; ask all the wives and daughters, and let them ‘dance till daylight does appear.’ Make very sure of the feminities, Wymonde,—the other creatures are certain to follow.”

“But how are you to distinguish the eligibles? You would surely not invite Ranters, Mormons, and all?” said Lillas.

“Every one of them: their private belief is nothing, so long as they are Wymonde’s people.”

“Our people, Miss Somers, if you please,” he said, threatening her with his finger.—“And what next, you large-hearted girl?”

She hesitated, coloured. “I almost think I must take counsel’s opinion on the propriety of the next item. That I should go with Wymonde to make calls upon the people, before we leave the Court, make ourselves known, and be vastly agreeable.—There, I thought you would all look surprised, but I do nevertheless believe it would have a very good effect.”

“And in what light do *you* wish to present yourself to the Bulegh tenantry?” asked

Charles, with a look of anything rather than approval.

"As—as—as—" she stammered, and coloured excessively.

Promptly did Wymonde come to her relief.

"As my affianced now, and as future mistress of Bulegh, of course, Mr. Ferrand."

"Ah! well, I think you need not note *that* down, Mr. Barry. I have grave doubts about the decorum of the proceeding: it is too early for her to take upon herself the duties of the mistress of Bulegh," he added, with a decided air.

"You, of course, are the best judge, Charles!" answered Mabel, with, nevertheless, a disappointed look. "I proposed it, because I thought it would bridge the gulf which separates Wymonde from his people; that a personal visit would be taken kindly. Something more, surely, should exist between landlord and tenant, than the bare, solitary fact, that one pays rent, which the other receives."

"Mabel is quite right — she is *always* right," said Wymonde, with a look of the proudest admiration depicted on his face. "It is to my shame that I know little or nothing of the people living under me; but

for the last two years *one pursuit* has engrossed me wholly.' Marked was his glance: significant his tone. "But I have always meant to acquit myself respectably of a landlord's duties, and I trust the time has now come to begin."

"You will not find it either a difficult or unpleasant task, dear Wymonde," said Mabel, eagerly. "Indeed, it is *very easy* for those in a superior position to awaken liking and good will in those of an inferior one. No hearts are deaf and dumb-born, I do believe."

A riotously-happy week was spent at Bulegh. In and out of the great, lofty rooms, did Mabel frolic with the children; through long, echoing galleries, up and down wide oak staircases, into turrets and towers, and all sorts of out-of-the-way places, till the solemn old house rang again with mirth and fun. And not alone the house,—the surrounding woods, the wild, wandering, untrimmed woods reverberated with most joyous play, and the purple hills and glens flung back the echoes.

Every day did Mabel ride out with Wymonde, that she might view the neighbourhood, which perfectly delighted her, with its most romantic, ever-varying scenery. "Enchanting, beautiful Bulegh," she called it, and

declared to Wymonde,—“ That she should go into a very ecstasy of happiness, when *there* she came to live and be his love :—she knew she should quite well, *though he might disbelieve it if he liked.*”

All too soon was the happy week over, and the day come for their return. Mabel and Wymonde occupied the last carriage. She looked up, as they drove away, to the long lines of armorial shields so deeply graven in the stone, and said,—

“ What a grand, stately look it has, dear,—such a proud, ancestral sort of air. You promise me not to alter it *very* much ? ”

“ I do promise you, Mabel,—not more than will suffice to make it a sumptuous home for my bride and wife : an earthly Eden for my Eve : a golden cage for my bird of paradise, lest she spread her wings, and fly away from me.”

Down thrust her little hand right into his, whilst, with eyes fixed on him, she whispered soft,—

“ *Can* bird do without a resting-place ? Can the clinging Vine stand without her supporting Elme ? ”

“ I wish you would compel me to tell you my thought, Mabel,” he said, presently.

"On your allegiance, tell."

"That Bulegh Court would form a charming retreat for a honey-moon: what think *you*? I do not forget that you are pledged to the Lago di Garda; but we might go there before honeymoon time cometh."

"Honeymoon time is years off. I will not pledge myself," she said, with a ready laugh, but readier blush. "By the way, Wymonde, in all our chat, we have never yet spoken of how we are to divide the year with our two homes. Must it be six months here, and six at Somerton?"

"And what time for town, my darling?"

The smile was arrested on her lip, and a look of surprise, regret, clouded her face at once, as she asked if they must *really* spend a portion of the year in London. Almost faltering was her accent.

Deepest tenderness was in his tone and manner, as he bade her listen to him.

"Let the smile come back, my Mabel: there is no cause for its departing. Now look at me, and tell me whether any man, having in his possession something which formed the exquisite joy of his life, could have his full measure of happiness, with this joy, this treasure of his away from him, unseen, unheard?"

Would not his thoughts be always flowing to it? Would not his fears be active? Would he not tremble with apprehension of harm to this precious possession of his? You, Mabel, are *my* precious possession, and exquisite joy, You are my pearl, my jewel, priceless and peerless. So long as I remain in Parliament, so long must I spend a portion of the year in London: but this must neither involve separation from you, nor yet subject you to what is distasteful; therefore, with our marriage my parliamentary life shall end."

"Oh! no, no, Wymonde, you must not sacrifice all to me. I will try to like London, —I will indeed," said Mabel, eagerly, with all her soul.

"Then, my love, you shall, for my sake, try one season. You must, of course, be presented to the Sovereign; then go through four or five months' bewildering gaiety, just to please me, and never again resume it, if in that time you have acquired no taste for it. Few, indeed, are there who, like you, object to come forth and "suffer themselves to be admired."

Frankly did Wymonde confess, in the conversation which ensued, to the noble vice, the glorious weakness of ambition. Strong and ardent had been his desire to stand in the

van ; to place himself in the foremost rank ; to win his way by power of mind, of thought, and intellect, till his name was syllabled by men, and he became a leader of them. As with a rainbow's span, his future lay defined and comprehended ; but there came a sudden change, — first felt on an autumn evening, under a transparent sky ; the colours all at once waxed pale and dim, and he cared not for their waning.

“ Yet the colours *may* come back : often we see rainbows re-illumine,” said Mabel, looking archly from under the lace of her little *cerise* parasol.

“ Were you not an enchantress, weaving spells to cross my whole life's warp and woof, it might be so, but——”

“ Ah ! *mon ami*, I see well what my rival is to be. When love's *ritornello* is all played out, very faithful servant to ambition will you be found.”

And so, with the most mischievous smile lurking in the glad, bright face, did she go on teasing, teasing.

CHAPTER V.

“When will ye think of me, kind friends,
When will ye think of me?”

MRS. HEMANS.

“THIS is my Mabel, mother,” was Wymonde’s introduction, as he stood with his betrothed’s arm in his, before her.

Mabel raised her eyes and saw a tall slight figure reclining on a couch; with two hands out-held for herself to take, and a smile, beautiful from its kindness, beaming from a pale, yet most dignified face.

Almost did she start, surely it was the original of some one of the sweet, stately-looking portraits at Bulegh Court; so living was the resemblance.

“You are my new daughter, Mabel,” came in a singularly soft, low voice, as she drew her towards her to fold her in a gentle, maternal embrace.

“Bring a chair for Mabel, and another for yourself. Wymonde, that you may sit together before me.”

She retained Mabel's hand, and gave her graceful thanks for coming to visit her.

"I can scarce leave my room, Mabel, or I should have come to *you*, instead of urging you to come to me. I have been very anxious to see you, my love. Wymonde has made us all so, for he writes and talks of no one save yourself, he is a sad love-sick creature; though I believe I share his heart with you," added Lady Barry, as she glanced fondly and proudly at her son.

A most simple, delicate, almost indolent manner, yet full of quiet dignity and self-possession, distinguished Lady Barry—the gentlest presence, yet one in which vulgarity could scarce breathe; and presumption would fall back, abashed.

They sat with her till she grew weary, her voice became faint, and she bade them leave her.

"You must kiss me, Mabel, before you go, and let me hear you say 'Mamma!'"

The same bewilder'd sort of feeling came across Mabel, as she did so, that had suddenly stolen over, when on stepping out of the carriage after her lover, some one, robed in white, clasped her, and called her "dear sister," and again, when another took possession of her,

and whispered, "dear, dear Mabel;" and who, after doing this, turned to offer a graceful welcome to Mrs. Abney and Mr. Ferrand; those two sweet-faced, lady-like looking girls, she had never seen before, yet did they greet *her* as sister, and embrace her fondly as if they had known her long.

Athalah, Miss Barry, did the honours of the house most pleasantly, and soon all were in animated conversation. Pleasing, high-bred, accomplished English ladies, were Wymonde's two sisters, like him, finely-featured, and sensible-looking—Hester was the prettier of the two, wore a more yielding expression, but Athalah's smile was beautiful, her air queenly.

A most tasteful villa of white stone, gleaming through lovely shrubberies, its walls covered with myrtle and passion flowers, and set amid gorgeous flower-beds, was Lady Barry's residence.

"Where is Annie?" at length asked Wymonde.

"Somewhere amongst the flowers, you may be sure; she hides herself amongst them more and more."

Even as the words were spoken, a slight, fragile, yet not altogether childish, form, presented itself at one of the windows; the white frock, the sash, and the mass of raven-black, shining

curls, falling down over the dimpled shoulders, bespoke a girl of fourteen ; yet more she might be ; child-like she stood, shyly gazing in ; a basket filled with flowers in her hand.

“ Have you forgotten me, Annie ? ” asked Wymonde, rising to approach her.

With an exclamation of delight she threw down her basket, flowers and all ; sprang into the room, and clasped him in her arms, kissing him vehemently, and lavishing on him the fondest names.

Wymonde coloured like a girl ; excessively, painfully embarrassed, he looked under the ardent greeting.

“ You are getting almost too old for so much kissing, Annie, you are scarce a child now,” he said, as he released himself gently from her embrace ; “ look round, there are some here you must make acquaintance with.”

She retained his hand as she gazed round with the shy timid air of a startled fawn, her eyes fell when she saw others looking at her.

“ Is that Mabel ? ” she asked, half hiding her face against his arm.

“ Yes, you must get friends with her very quickly.” He led her to Mrs. Abney first ; and introduced her as their cousin, ‘ Miss Leyden,’ and then drew her away to Mabel.

"This young cousin of ours, Mabel, who is dear to us as a sister, is a most affectionate-hearted, but impulsive, wild little girl; has no discretion at all; have you, Annie?"

"I fear not—I see you are looking gravely at me, Wymonde, as if thinking of scolding me; stay, I will not to be scolded."

Without another word she sprang out into the grounds again, and was quickly lost to sight.

The only child of one high in Indian office, was the shy, graceful young girl, worshipped, watched as a divinity, or something nigh akin to it, by her parents, who, when the baleful climate told unmistakeably upon their one fragile flower, sent her, freighted with prayers, and blessings innumerable, to be under the maternal charge of Lady Barry, to whom they were nearly related. Four years she had been residing under her guardianship.

She returned to the room after a time; and with a grave, subdued air, seated herself at a distance from any one.

Mabel at length caught her eye, and beckoned her to her.

"You are very fond of flowers, are you not?"

"I am, Miss Somers, *they* never repulse

me," she added with a cold, proud glance, at Wymonde.

"I too am very fond of flowers, will you kindly gather me a bouquet?"

Her face lighted up with pleasure at the commission; and she was soon flitting about the gay *parterre*. All animation was she, on her return with a superb bouquet. "Do you understand the language of flowers?" she asked, as she gave it into Mabel's hand; "do you know what these say?" holding up an exquisite rose-bud, and spray of starry myrtle.

"No, I do not."

"I will tell you, exactly: I know all the myths of the flowers; of these pale English ones,—and those of the gorgeous children of the East, sun-kissed into such ineffable light and glow as here you never see. There—*there* grow flowers; O, the roses' breath! O, the scented air! O, the rich odours floating round till you are faint,—faint with subtile perfume!" Impassioned grew her eye and voice: "O for an hour of it, one hour of waking-dreaming; dreaming-waking, reclining in an arbour of *chenéleis*, and *bélas*; steeped in languid bliss, lost in it as in Paradise; your soul were floating, exhaled away from earth in divinely-placid luxury of being; a god-like

calm of rest : your dull, clayey self not there—forgotten, thrust aside : wholly spirit-mastered.”

How glorious looked her eyes ; what marvellous depths ; what burning light flashed out ; what fire in their darkness—for they were dark as night ; how rapt the gaze, as the vehement words found way ! But they finished ; and a sudden flush of almost painful consciousness rose up, and dyed the pale, clear face.

“ Impulse again, cousin,” she said, with a half-appealing, half-defiant smile ; “ you will weary of waiting to hear the sentiment of these two flowers. Give them to Miss Somers, Wymonde, and tell her that the one bids her to ‘ love you,’ the other commands her ‘ to be faithful to the end.’ ”

“ Thanks, dear Annie ; a very kind and good heart you have,” he said, as he took and pressed the hand which gave.

“ I marvel to hear *you* say such courteous words !” came in a slightly sarcastic tone : “ But a brief time has passed since you were almost stern, and wholly cold with me. But no more will I expose myself to such rebuffs—no longer be an impulsive child. At fifteen ’tis time to put away childish things ;—and

you, Wymonde, will be pleased from this day to address me as Miss Leyden. I am no longer Annie ! ”

“ Be generous, and forgive me if I wounded you ; deeply should I regret saying or doing aught which gave you pain, Annie—Miss Leyden.”

“ Now that she has received them, I give you this for yourself, Wymonde ; ’tis the emblem of austerity.”

Presenting, as she spoke, a flower of the Scotch thistle.

“ I know that you all mean kindly, when reproving me for yielding to my feelings, though scarce can I take it kindly, when the reproofs are uttered before strangers. But I shall—*will* discipline myself. Needful indeed it is, when you live with those who *cannot* understand you.”

In vain he strove to soothe ; she had been deeply pained.

Soon did Mabel become perfectly at home—soon learn to say *ma mère* without the bidding. Much time she spent in Lady Barry’s room : on a low ottoman beside her couch would she sit, hand-in-hand with her, whilst listening with wonderful interest to family annals and histories. Fail she did

not, to gather all the incidents concerning the lovely Lady Janet, whose sad story had so impressed her.

“Do you think it possible, Mamma, that there *can* be any resemblance between Athalah and Lady Janet? I have once or twice thought so, when she has smiled.”

“It has been remarked by so many, Mabel, that I think some slight resemblance *must* exist.”

“But do you know, Mamma, there is a great air of Bulegh about you all! A sort of hereditary look—Wymonde has it; and you yourself.”

“I should like you to see Gerard, Mabel,” said Lady Barry, with an amused smile; “you would think that he most certainly *was* one of the portraits stepped out from the canvas.”

——But now comes Wymonde, to inquire “If his mother is not wearying herself by so much talking?”

The most affectionate devotion distinguished his manner to her. Quicker than any to note any little added indisposition; gentler almost than any, in every little office he fulfilled for her.

“No one could arrange her cushions so daintily as he did,” she would say, with a glance of fond, proud love.

"We could not imagine what had come over Wymonde the winter he spent with us in Rome, Mabel," said Lady Barry. "From being tolerably calm and steadfast, he had become the most restless of beings—always wanting to hurry us back to England. Never was such a zealous lover of his country; he could scarce live out of it. I did not, for long, fathom the mystery of all the ardour—guess that there was a fair magnet drawing him!—He seems to regard you with boundless faith and love, dear child. I trust there will be life-long affection between you, and also between you and his sisters!"

And Mabel, with her whole heart on her lips, promised "That there should be. She herself had no sisters, or brother, or mother, or—or——"

"You will belong entirely to us, my sweet love," put in Lady Barry, seeing her emotion, and drawing her to her with an affectionate caress.

Another sister, beside Lady Gerard Barry, there was yet to make acquaintance with—Grace, the eldest, who, with her husband, the Right Hon. Sir Arthur Dayncourt, was now abroad.

Very natural was it, that, day by day,

Mabel should feel this new mother, and those new, gentle sisters, winning upon her—and more and more warmly respond to the terms of endearment falling from their lips. Taking their places were they in her heart, not to be displaced again.

With one alone of the family group she had not yet become friendly : her sweet and graceful manners made no way with Annie Leyden. Fitful, wilful, moody, was the young girl ; sometimes affectionate ; then again most repelling ; shunning all ; shut up in her own thoughts. For hours did she sit alone in the grounds (or companioned only by the *Amah* who had rocked her cradle, and loving with the absorbing devotion of her race, had left all to follow her young charge to England), weaving flowers into fantastic shapes, and singing low to herself in soft Hindoostanee, a rich Cachemere thrown over her head, or draped about her in unstudied, but most perfect grace.

Her favourite seat was under a drooping birch, by a fountain side : and there Mabel one day found her : shawls, blue, scarlet, orange, heaped together in most effective contrast, formed a sort of divan on which she reclined.

Shakspeare, Moore, Byron, were lying open around her. She was reading; and now and then her red lips moved in soft repetition of some portion which more particularly pleased her young and ardent imagination.

"You have delightful shade here, Annie; may I join you?" Mabel softly asked.

"Pray do," she answered, with a start of surprise at her appearance; "it is not often, with my Indian constitution, that I feel the sun too hot; but to-day I do. Sit down."

Soon were they talking — Annie most earnestly, for their subject was poetry, about which she was a superlative enthusiast.

"It is not alone that it does (as you say), 'make our common things grow fair'—it does more—it elevates to rapture by its winged words! Turning from it (as one must), is like leaving the warmth and glory of heaven to come down to the chill, drear earth, where sorrow and sighing never flee away! Oh, for the dove's pinions to pass away from it all!"

Her sad, despondent gaze fixed on the mild, blue heaven, as she spoke.

"Is it sinful to wish you had never been born? Is it *very* wrong to crave to die in your

youth, as I do? They tell me so; but they know not *my* soul's bitterness, and cannot understand me. We are unlike as these two dyes," grasping two of the shawls as she spoke: "*they*, having no dark thoughts, cannot tell what it is to long for death—to covet the peace of the grave—to ask for it—pray for it, as for hid treasure!"

With unutterable surprise Mabel listened to her; so young and lovely—the idol of parents and friends—to have such morbid visitings of melancholy, seemed so strange.

"I see I have amazed you," went on the impassioned girl. "Only in poetry can I find kindred thoughts. Heart there speaks to heart—soul to soul. Never does it tell you, that you may fashion your own destiny—that you must overcome grief, and wrestle with what is like to break your heart. No, in that alone the truth is spoken, that life and suffering are one; and that thrice blessed are the early called from it all. But yet I wish not to die here—no weeper, save my *Amah*, over my grave. Did you ever hear that tender Hindoo phrase, 'May you die amongst your kindred?' Is it not expressive? Do *you* ever, in that glorified life you are leading,

think of dying, or heaven? Have *you* ever known what it was to shed secret tears, to mourn for aught or anything whatever?"

Mocking had grown her voice, scornful her eyes, as she uplifted them to Mabel's face; yet in a moment did she change from wounding scorn to almost tenderness, as she beheld a quivering lip and quick falling tears.

"Is it something I have said, dear Mabel?" she asked, as she threw her arms around her; "let me kiss your tears away. I, that would not willingly harm a fly, am always wounding some one. Yet shall I like you better, now that I see your eye can droop with pain—that you share the common lot—that you are not really a dweller on a watch-tower, too high-raised, for aught to touch you."

Wymonde's voice was heard; he was seeking Mabel in the grounds. "She is here. I am encompassed with barbed hooks of steel, and have wounded her."

"Tears, Mabel, my darling—what, how is this?" he asked, in accents of surprise, wholly unheeding Annie's words—forgetting her presence, even, in regarding Mabel's agitation. He drew her head down on his breast, and, murmuring fond, caressing phrases, such as love delights in when it consoles and

soothes, passionately kissed her cheek and brow.

With a steadfast gaze did the young girl regard them, though her hands clenched, and her breast heaved ; whilst a flush, hot, burning again, rose up to her temples ; but it faded, leaving even her very lips pale, and she turned away. With a sudden impulse she ran till she had reached a secluded portion of the shrubbery,—then threw herself upon a seat, buried her face in her hands, and, moaning wildly, almost fiercely, shivered from head to foot, as though it had been midwinter.

Into a fortnight had the week lengthened for which the party came ; with marvellous rapidity had the time gone. Lady Barry pleaded for yet a little longer stay ; but Charles said it must not be. Would he, then, leave Mabel with them ? A smiling negative did Charles return, though Mabel pleaded also, and jested about his exceeding strict guardianship.

The last evening had come. Rising slowly from the gently-surfing sea was the broad, round harvest moon : out in the balcony watching it were the lovers. All had taken coffee in Lady Barry's room ; who was in unusual strength and spirits ; and was now con-

versing earnestly with Charles and Mrs. Abney in an under tone.

"She is so very lovely in person ; but still more than that, is the look of goodness—of—what shall I say ?—something angelic in her face," smiling, as she spoke, at her own redundant word.

"She is most thoroughly womanly, I assure your ladyship," replied Charles, with an answering smile ; "does not live on 'angel's food' at all. Mabel's most distinguishing properties are generosity, and good sense." His smile deepened as he added, "One, who has been married ten years, must needs be excused paying elaborate compliments, or seeing any possible resemblance between feminine and angelic natures."

"You must not be too severe in your criticism. My son tells me what a very charming person Mrs. Ferrand is."

Still more confidential did the conversation become. Lady Barry was telling that she should, in the ensuing May, be called upon to part with her daughter Athalah ; her marriage, with the eldest scion of a lordly house, was arranged to take place then. Coupled with the information was a request for not

only Mabel, but Ethelle and Maud Ferrand to be present as bridesmaidens.

So it was promised that Lilius and the whole party should come to the Island, when

“Primrose and cowslip meek, perfume the gale.”

Tenderly affectionate was the parting between Mabel and those new-found friends.

“Take care that you love us all, child, not alone Wymonde—I see that you lavish enough on him, without bidding from me—it is for the rest of us that I claim it,” said Lady Barry, with a beaming smile.

“I will, mamma; I will, indeed; and you will think of me, sometimes, I hope.”

“Every day, dear Mabel, at the least, we’ll promise you,” said Hester, gaily.

“I know *I* shall think of you every time I come into mamma’s room, and miss you and Wymonde from the balcony: what hours you have spent there, to be sure!” exclaimed Athalah, with a laugh.

So with every name of endearment on their lips, they said, Good-bye; yet were the sisters still standing beside the carriage, chatting, when all were seated in it, ready to depart.

“Dear me! how neglectful I have been,”

suddenly exclaimed Wymonde; "I have forgotten to say farewell to Annie. Where is she?"

Athalah and Hester looked around. "She was here but a few minutes since," said Hester; "I will go and fetch her."

"No, never mind: I will go to her," replied Wymonde, and sprang out of the carriage.

"Annie, Annie!" he called, as he entered the house, but no answer came. From one apartment to another he went; and found her at length, standing at an open window of the back drawing-room, gazing abstractedly over the sea.

"Annie, dear, I have not said 'Good-bye' to you."

He grasped her hand, and bent, as was his wont, to kiss her cheek, but she drew back.

Wymonde laughed: "You are surely not going to deny me a brotherly kiss, Annie? it will be the first time you have done so."

"I am," she replied, with a look of the most perfect immobility.

"What nonsense, you wayward child!"

"I am no longer a child."

"Granted, that you are not. Yet, I should as soon think of Athalah or Hester refusing to kiss me as you; brother and cousin too, am I not, Annie?"

"Brother, you are not," she said, impetuously: "and cousin, in quite too remote a degree, to entitle you to kiss me at your coming and going."

The half-laugh with which Wymonde had hitherto spoken, changed to a look of surprise.

"Don't be petulant, Annie. I have, at all events, brotherly regard for you, and that is why I have always greeted you, as I do my sisters."

"Granted, as you say: but I am no longer a child."

"Well, you shall not be a child, then; you shall be as you are—a wilful, but very affectionate-hearted girl, who will feel sorry when her cousin has departed, that she has, for the first time, let him go with chilling, almost unkind words. Come, dear Annie, this is foolish; say 'Good-bye,' and let me go."

And again he bent to kiss her cheek. But some strange agitation seized, and mastered her till she shook in every limb, as his lips touched her blooming face.

"For God's sake, Annie, what *is* the matter?" he asked, in downright alarm.

"I am no longer a child. *Can* you not understand?" came faint, yet thrilling from her lips.

Searching grew his gaze upon the face, over which rushed the burning blood; her eyes drooped and fell, her mobile features trembled convulsively; she panted for breath.

Truly, she was no longer the child: she was an impassioned woman, glowing with seductive beauty.

"What do you *mean* me to understand?" asked Wymonde, in low, yet firm-ringing tone.

"Nothing—nothing—Go, Sir,—leave me. Away with you to her who is waiting your leisure so patiently," came in accents of ineffable bitterness.

There was silence for some moments; quivering the child-woman stood; her whole form dilating and expanding under the power of that fiery current, filling her veins. Her arms were folded over her throbbing heart; she was panting and struggling for needful breath; her glorious eyes were downcast to the earth; the falling masses of magnificent hair, alone shading her cheek's scorching glow. Her whole expression and attitude, that of one who, with her own right hand, had rent aside the veil standing between her and death doom.

Scarcely more appalled could Wymonde be, had a horrible pitfall yawned beneath his

foot. Agitated was his voice when he at length spoke.

"*I will* go to her, Annie. With her my life's lot is cast ; and I would not change it, now or ever."

He turned to leave the room, but was recalled by her words of almost inarticulate despair.

She tottered towards him, pale as the snow-drift ; all the haughty defiance gone ; her small, white hands extended rigidly, as if she fain would, but had not power to stop him.

She whispered, " But once—once only, kiss me, Wymonde, before you go—for the last time it will be !—that I may know you do not utterly scorn and loathe me for what you have learned this day."

And as she spoke, she tried to take his hands with those pale rigid ones of hers.

Gently, but coldly, he put aside her grasp.

" No, Annie, I can never again kiss you ; it would be a crime in me, after what you have said."

A moan broke from her ; she reeled, and would have fallen at his feet, had he not caught her. He carried her to a sofa and laid her down.

"I thank you not," came hoarsely from her lips; "'twere better you had let me fall. O God, God! that I should live and breathe for this! With an iron foot have you crushed me into the dust, as you would a noxious reptile!"

"This is downright madness, Annie; recal your senses! Recollect who and what you are! and listen—for you *must* hear what I have to say. Root out, at once and for ever, this girlish, childish fancy of yours."

"'Tis no girlish fancy. You have treated me with a brother's tenderness, without a brother's title; and now you shrink back in cowardly alarm from the result! You have considered me a child too long, Wymonde. Child I have not been; and you ought to have known it!"

"You are a child still, Annie, or I would not stand here talking with you—a child, a sentimental, nonsensical child! No *woman* would have betrayed the feelings you have done; she would have died first. See that you are silent as the grave about it. Nothing save sorrow and shame can come of——"

"Wymonde—Wymonde!" echoed through the house. "Where are you?—oh! you are here! Mr. Ferrand is getting *quite* impatient!" said his sister Hester.

"I have been talking with Annie; she is not well—excitable—nervous—needs soothing. So come to her; be very kind; and don't tease her with asking questions. She will be better in an hour or two—shall you not, Annie? Now good-bye! and God bless you both!"

He took a hand of each, pressed them kindly, and passed out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

"Loving life and all that's in it,
More and more each golden minute."

BLANCHARD.

FAR, far away over the seas, spreading their pinions in lustrous lands of the sun, were the swallows, and many gay song-birds. The corn was laid up in storehouse and barn. Purple fruits were gathered in. Moaning a requiem were the loud piping winds. Summer was dead: under showers of reluctant leaves, autumn had buried her.

Very busy was the ever-busy Mabel, for Christmas was coming, and her Christmas preparations must be made. Festively was the season to be kept at Somerton. More than the usual gifts given: more feasting and enjoyment provided for her people.

For months had Ruth Collins been actively at work, making up all sorts of comfortable things for Christmas offerings.

There had been an immense amount of letter writing going on between Nelly Val-

lancey and Mabel: arguments brought forward and demolished, precedents quoted and refuted, reasons advanced and overthrown, ere it could be properly and definitely arranged that the Vallancey party should come to the Ferrands, instead of the Ferrand party going to the Vallanceys. One of Mabel's letters to the Colonel ran thus—

“ I *cannot* come to the Manor, for my people are all looking for Christmas good wishes, accompanied by Christmas gifts, which, I fancy, are always more valued when dispensed by my own personal hands. Then, all the elders of the village, and all the women and children are to have great dinings, and tea-drinkings, and dancings. Indeed we are going to be very happy, very merry, and not wise at all, for Christmas comes but once a year. I have felt much inclined to make it a holiday week altogether, for my poor tillers and toilers; but Wymonde, who is, *of course*, lawgiver to me, says ‘no—no,’ that it would be positively injurious; so, as I do not think him ever wrong, I yield the point at once.

“ You will see by all these details, that I (par consequence we) cannot come to you, and that equally par consequence, you must come to us. Yes, dearest and best of guardians as you are,

you shall come and bring with you, Jane and Harry, and that dear little thing of a baby of theirs, which I am wearying to see. Are its eyes like Jane's?

"I desire that Nelly will bring with her the MS. of the new novel she has been writing; and Philip—ah! what a treasure Philip is—shall read it aloud to us, as he did the first. I wonder whether Nelly, or Nelly's papa, is proudest about that second edition I see advertised. By the way, tell Nelly that Charles is a little alarmed at *all* literary ladies; he considers that the first duty of woman is to be agreeable.

" ' All other graces
Will follow in their proper places.'

"I warn Nelly beforehand, that she may comport herself meekly when here she comes, as here she will come, for I have so willed it, and no one ever says 'nay' to me."

So the Manor party was to come the day but one before Christmas-day. On that day at noon, Mabel, her lover, and Mrs. Abney, drove to Somerton.

For the Christmas gifts had to be distributed; ready arranged were they on a long table in the vestibule of the Hall. From year to year had the villagers experienced the bounty

of the Somers's family, but never before had the pleasant scene looked so thoroughly happy as it did now, and Mabel happiest of all, for *she was giving*.

After the people had departed, there was a very whispering interview between her and Mrs. Godfrey in a window recess. Something was unfolded and inspected, which Mrs. Godfrey affirmed was quite *too* rich and handsome, fit for any lady in the land; but which Mabel, on her part, thought was not in the least too handsome, but very becoming, and which Mrs. Godfrey must wear at Church on Christmas-day, just to oblige her.

And then Mabel and Wymonde went their way to call upon the Doctor and Mr. Abney. They found the Doctor and Fraülein von Bunsen promenading in the garden—sunning themselves in fact—though close upon Christmas. Mabel stole a lot of Damask roses that were clustering about the windows, whilst listening to the Doctor's complaints against Eunice, for encroaching upon his time with her walks, and rides, and drives; the young gipsy cared nothing for his clock-work habits, *he* must do as *she* liked.

And then Mabel said something which made the Doctor look embarrassed, (for a

whisper concerning him had reached her ear that day). Merrily and mischievously she laughed, for it was plain enough it was true—he almost blushed about it. —

A book was lying open on Philip's table, one of Miss Strickland's volumes ; and Mabel asked him if he had noticed a description of some one in the latter portion of it ? He had not ; so, asking him for a book-marker, that she might not lose his place, she began to turn the pages, that she might find the part for him ; he had no book-markers, and hastily tore up an envelope for an impromptu one.

"I will find you a more elegant one than that," she said with a smile ; and took one of the Damask roses from her bosom, where they were fastened by her shawl pin ; "flowers are the very prettiest book-markers ; but as they are not always available, remember that I make you some. Ah ! here the passage is ; I will leave it open ; and tell me, to-morrow, if you do not think it a very fine description ?"

They sat long, chatting, and at length hurried away, ever so much later than they ought to have been. As they walked quickly to the Hall, Wymonde said,

"I cannot tell, what it is about your pet

clergyman, Mabel; but I never feel to get on with him."

"You astonish me, Wymonde. I thought all *must* like Philip."

"I do not know what it is, a something of reserve or coldness: but as I said before, I cannot get on with him at all."

"But you surely esteem him highly, Wymonde?"

"As a devoted minister, undoubtedly I do, but otherwise (to speak frankly) I do not like him."

Watching their retreating figures, till they were out of sight, stood Philip; then with that look of painful despondence on his face, which was so often there, he returned to the room, and seated himself where she had sat; he pressed his lips to the table where *her* hand had lain; and reverently gazed at the rose—the book-marker—but did not touch it. It was a sacred thing; it had rested on her bosom; and been left with him—with him—but *not* to touch.—

The night was frosty and cold; and Wymonde insisted upon Mabel's being so wrapped up in furs and cloaks, before he allowed her to get into the carriage, that she laughingly declared, that it was not herself, but the Doctor's mummy.

“—— Who is it? who is it?” she called out in a voice of great alarm; when, on reaching Beechwood, she suddenly found herself locked in a pair of strong arms; and kissed over and over again.

The Colonel was so pleased to have frightened her, that he laughed till the tears ran down his face.

“Why, my dear child,” said he, as well as he could for mirth, “whoever, did you suppose, beside myself, would clasp you round and kiss you, whilst that lover of yours was standing by? *How* do you do, Mr. Barry? how *do* you do, Sir?” Even whilst shaking hands, the Colonel’s mirth exploded again.

Yes; the whole party was there; Nelly and Jane—smiling happy Jane—and Captain Harry, (who had surely grown stouter; and looked altogether more imposing as a married man.) What greetings and caressings there were; how often did Mabel, and Jane, and Nelly kiss, call each other “darlings;” and tell, how glad, how very glad, they were to meet. But a little quiet came at length, and then a whispered inquiry from Mabel to Jane.

Soft and tender grew Jane’s bright eyes as she told, that dear Baby was wonderfully

CHAPTER VII.

“ I saw her ‘ troops of friends ’ encircling,
Read kind good will in many a face,
With a bright glance that seem’d exulting ;
O happy world ! O pleasant place ! ”

Past and Present.

THE next morning was Mabel’s business morning. References and appeals to her had accumulated so fast, that, to prevent constant demands upon her time, one morning in the week was set aside, when she was always to be found at home. Mr. Ferrand was occasionally with her ; sometimes her agent ; but this morning she gave audience alone.

Several had come and gone, and Ruth Collins was now with her. Looking healthy once more was Ruth ; but her bloom had faded, never to come back. For some time did Mabel speak with her, and the girl’s face got quite in a glow of pleasure.

“ A year is a long time, Ruth : much *may* occur in it, though, I trust, nothing will come to set this aside ; and, if all is as could be wished, I may safely promise that, in twelve

months' time, you shall come to me as my personal attendant. Next Christmas, we will say. I do not doubt for an instant that you will be a well-conducted girl, and strive to please me in every way."

"I shall count the days as they go by, Miss Somers," were her simple words; but the look which accompanied spoke volumes.

"I have good news for you, Mrs. Ashwell," exclaimed Mabel, as the door opening again gave entrance to the stirring widow, and little Sarah and Betsy, Mabel's *protégées*; "and for my two little friends here, who have kindly come to see me, and tell me that they have been well and happy at school, and also very industrious. Is it not so, Sarah and Betsy?"

Very smiling was the response; and Mabel said she should come up to the Crowhurst, on purpose to hear them read, and see their writing, sewing, &c. And her quick eye took in every minutia of their appearance directly: well satisfied was she with their neat dresses, and active, cheerful faces. And she bade the grandmother take the two little smiling maidens to the housekeeper's room, to eat Christmas cake, and to drink her health.

Excellent tidings she had for the grandmother. The poor witless boy, John, was

slowly, but steadily, making progress. After many relapses and fallings back, he was now capable of application and of receiving instruction. With no little pride and pleasure she showed some most beautiful baskets—his gift to his benefactress. She had written him back her thanks; and the Superior of the excellent establishment in which he was placed informed her, that John Ashwell cried like a child when her letter was read to him.

“I dare say, Mrs. Ashwell, he will be with you, next Christmas, quite restored, and able to come with you to see me.”

“God grant it!” said the widow, cheerfully.

Waiting her turn to see Mabel was another, whom I trust my readers have not forgotten. It was Margaret Fisher, portfolio in hand, and walking free from lameness.

“It does me good to see you, Margaret, looking so well. You are come, like an affectionate daughter, to spend Christmas with your mother?”

Yes, Margaret had; and much she had to tell of comparative health, of cheerful spirits, of leaving off laudanum, and of most absorbing interest in her drawing, as she opened her portfolio to show some of her sketches.

Every vacation—the only time that Mar.

garet was at liberty from her school—had Mabel sent her to London, to get more thorough instruction than the country admitted of. Steadily and well she had got on. Mabel was both surprised and pleased with her progress.

One drawing was of artistic skill. It was of a calm, azure sea, with one only vessel, every sail set, in sight. The golden sun was shining down on the sleeping waters, which the gallant ship was gliding through with gentlest motion. The deception was perfect.

Another there was. The same ship, apparently, with now every sail furled, and driven along by a resistless hurricane. Strange, ghostly light, from a gibbous moon set in a dismal sky, was tracking the sea, and horribly lighting up a raging bed of foam right in the vessel's path, and on which she was rapidly driving, chased by wind and wave to destruction. "Breakers ahead!" you must needs cry out frantically, though no human effort could avert the doom.

"Are you very fond of painting the sea and ships, Margaret?" asked Mabel, with a grave countenance.

"Yes, Miss Somers," was the reply, in a low voice.

"Have you painted them in any way beside what I see?"

"Yes, one on fire, and again amid icebergs."

"Will you grant me a favour, Margaret?" was asked in a low, soft tone.

"Anything—anything, Miss Somers."

"That you will give to me these paintings of sea and ship, and that you will not, at present, paint sea or ship again? You have discontinued the use of laudanum for your bodily ill: will you, at my earnest request, discontinue feeding the trouble lying deep in your mind? Eight years gone by, and the vessel never heard of.—Is he, your lover, on the waters *still*, Margaret?"

"No, he is in heaven," she answered, with a burst of tears. "I am resigned—I must be; though God, who sent the trouble, alone can tell how heavy the load has been."

"Don't weep so sadly, Margaret. Take comfort in the thought that you will meet again." ——

The tears *must* flow for a little while; but when she grew calm, Mabel unfolded a plan she had formed for her going to Italy to study. A relative of Mr. Barry's was going—a Miss Leyden—who was in delicate health, and for whom change of scene was ordered. She

would leave England, the following week, for Rome, with a party, and spend some months with Mr. Barry's two sisters, who were residing there. Would Margaret like to go with Miss Leyden? would she desire to have such an opportunity of improving herself? If she would, Mr. Barry would write to his sisters, and place Margaret under their protection.

"Oh! she would like it very much—very much," said Margaret, with a flushing-up look of pleasure; "but her school—her mother—"

"May be safely left to me, Margaret; so we will consider the matter settled. But you must be very speedy with your preparations."

Further discussion was prevented by a rap at the door, and Wymonde's entrance.

"This is Margaret—Margaret Fisher, Wymonde," said Mabel.

Courteous was his bow and address to the girl, who curtsied, coloured, and looked very shy.

Never had Wymonde stood higher in Mabel's estimation than at that moment: she herself thought so much of the gentle amenities which embellish life's intercourse. Indeed, it was this which threw such winningness over her manners—gave such a crowning charm to her excelling beauty. Never absent to place,

circumstance, or individuals, her response to the courtesy of the beggar on the highway, was as ready and as graceful as it was to that of one holding the same position of life with herself.

As the door closed on Margaret, Mabel assuming an exceedingly pre-occupied air, gravely inquired the nature of Mr. Barry's business with her? Not less sweet than saucy was the ringing laugh which followed.

The Colonel spent the morning at Somerton, witnessing the Christmas festivities; and gave Mabel a most graphic account of the proceedings when they met in the drawing-room before dinner. "It had done him an immense deal of good," he said, "the seeing so many happy comfortable-looking faces;" and he could not help telling them so, when he thanked them for drinking Mabel's health. He flattered himself, that he had made a very neat speech upon the occasion.

The drawing-room was filling fast; for a large party was to assemble at dinner. Mabel occupied a companion-chair in a corner, with Wymonde; the Colonel, Philip Abney, and the Doctor grouped about her.

"I really think, Colonel, we must divide the party next Christmas," she said; "have half here, and half at Somerton."

"Aye, it will be better, perhaps. How the time speeds, to think that you have but one more Christmas before attaining your majority, *then* of course, we shall have great festivities."

"More particularly as it will be a double occasion," said Wymonde, significantly.

For an instant the Colonel failed to understand; but a glance at Mabel's half-laughing, half-embarrassed face, let him into the secret.

He laughed outright, as he asked "If it was *really possible*, that she meant to be married on the very first day it was permissible?"

"No—no;" she said, with a mounting colour.

"*I mean it*, Colonel," observed Wymonde, with an air of triumph.

"I take you all to witness," exclaimed Mabel, "that I have no part in this plan. *I will not* be married against my will," she added, with a saucy laugh.

"Well really, my dear," said the Colonel, "I am almost inclined to vote with Mr. Barry. It is scarcely worth while to form your establishment before you do marry, and I do not see any reason for delay."

"I may remark, *en passant*, that I am a freeborn Englishwoman, therefore *not* to be

coerced, which you two gentlemen seem to forget. I believe I am my own property," she added, absolutely pouting.

"Not you, indeed," retorted the Colonel, "not in the least your own: you belong to our young senator here, or we are all very much mistaken. You have given yourself to him."

"Not in the face of the sun, and in the eye of light!" A sort of voluntary offering, I grant you."

"Why, the child's growing wilful, absolutely wilful," exclaimed the Colonel; "what's the meaning of it, Mr. Barry? You've been spoiling her, I suppose. It won't do—it won't do, Sir, with the best of them.—Women *must* be kept under."

"King Ahasuerus all over, I declare, issuing royal commandments," said Mabel, with an air of laughing defiance at them both; and fanning herself at a great rate with a feather fan.

"Take her in hand, Mr. Barry,—take her in hand, Sir, and don't extend the golden sceptre at present."

"Ah me—ah me,—I fear! Doctor, *do* help me?" cried Mabel with irrepressible merriment.

"By the way, Philip, when are we to hear

of *you* seeking out a wife?" asked the pertacious Colonel.

"Oh, Colonel,—I'm a regularly persecuted man on that subject; the whole neighbourhood, with Miss Somers at the head, is dictating to me, that I *must* marry."

"And why not, Philip?—A wife is needful to your standing, to your comfort, to your well-being. It matters not that you do not see it in this light; persons are not allowed, on these points, to please themselves; *are they*, Mabel?—their duty is to please others. You are looking far from well,—it is hinted to me that you consume too much 'midnight oil,'—and I believe you need a wife to take care of you. So I say again, get married. The Doctor, I am sure, will agree with what I say."

"Ahem! Yes, certainly," put in the Doctor—"if you do not get wedded before, why you shall pair off on the day Miss Somers does; your banns shall be published together. I shall take it all upon myself."

"Colonel—Colonel!"

"Don't Colonel me, Sir, but do as I tell you. I am glad to see that you are giving that young lady a lecture, Mr. Barry: she deserves it at your hands. I never *will* sanction rebellion."

In truth, Wymonde was wounded, and when he remonstrated, Mabel accused him of high-handed despotism, called him pertinacious and impudent, and finally avowed herself quite tired of the subject.

"But Mabel dear, *I believe* I am accepted lover, pledged husband—have 'vested rights?'"

Mabel laughed and said, she had never denied it, but the subject *must* drop—awearied of it she was.

"I shall resume it again and soon, Mabel. We *will* be married the day you are twenty-one."

She fashioned her pretty lip into a most contumacious and rebellious "no," as they paired off to the dinner table, where Mabel was abundantly lively, and Wymonde a shade graver than usual, amid the general Christmas hilarity. Difficult was it to say whether Lillas or the Colonel were in the gayest spirits, or excelled most in repartee.

Mabel and her aunt retired early from table, it being Miss Somers's first reception, her Christmas-eve "at home." Not long time elapsed before the party dropped off, one after another, and found their way to her drawing-room.

She had exchanged her dinner dress of rich velvet, for one of soft Indian muslin, embroid-

ered in silver ; not a trimming about it to mar the most graceful outline, but the skirt looped up on one side with expanded oleanders, and the short sleeves also looped from the shoulders with the same. Damask roses were wreathed about her glossy hair, and fastened in her bouquet. She had worn rich jewels at dinner, now she had not one about her, and none did her exquisite beauty need.

“ Mabel—*my* beautiful Mabel, *do you know* how lovely you are ? ” asked Wymonde in a low whisper.

Still more sparkling grew the face, as it uplifted blushing to his gaze, and she told that she was not in the humour for any confessions, that she was not individual but public property that evening, and should dispense her smiles without let or hindrance from any.

Sauciness itself she looked, as he bade her “ beware.”

Blazing with light was the room, the walls covered with festooned drapery of crimson, mingled with triple holly, ivy and mistletoe. At the upper end towered a noble Christmas tree, which repeated itself in the magnificent mirror there covering the whole surface of the wall. In every bough and branch were suspended coloured lamps, and from them

depended most tasteful and beautiful things, suitable for giving and receiving.

Quite a buzz of admiration was heard ; the effect was so very striking, as all gathered round the tree.

“ O what a German thing ! ” ejaculated the young Fraülein ; “ it was most beautiful—most beautiful.”

In the midst of the distribution of pretty things, Mabel took up a little box, and whispered the Colonel—something mischievous was in progress, you might be sure, from the sparkle in the eyes of both.

“ This box is for you, Mr. Abney,” she said ; “ it contains a few of the little things so often required, but which unfortunate celibates so seldom have. Will you kindly receive it, and also this pair of slippers, which I have had much pleasure in working for you ? ”

“ But there is one condition,” added the Colonel, quickly, seeing that Mabel stopped short in what was to be said ; “ it is this, that you lay everything open to our inspection that is in the box.”

No sooner said than done ; all gathered round to look at the contents drawn out : first emerged book-markers, then a bundle of spills ; a pence-jug followed a Bohemian glass paper-

cutter in a pen tray, and last came a tiny thing wrapped up in jeweller's cotton.

"Give that to him yourself, Mabel," said the Colonel; and thus spurred on, she took the little cottoned-up thing in her hand, and proceeded to unfold it; underneath the cotton was silver paper; by a quick movement, she slipped that away, and gave it to Philip, bidding him examine and see whether anything was written on it.

Yes, written in her own flowing characters were the words (which he read aloud), "For the hand which you love best." As he uttered them, Mabel tendered to him—a wedding ring.

"'Tis a wedding-ring!" quoth she, with irrepressible mirth.

"A wedding-ring!" repeated the Colonel, who guffawed with the keenest relish of the jest.

"A wedding-ring—a wedding-ring!" passed electrically round the room, and a great peal of laughter followed.

And there is Mabel still holding out the ring to Philip, who stands with a face and brow of crimson, and a heart whose pulses seem beating to the death with agitation.

"Take it," said she, bending on him her eyes of light and radiance.

And he took it.

But, hark ! What sound is that which rises above the hum of many voices, the tones of pleasant mirth ?

"How very sweet ; Christmas carols, I declare," exclaimed Mabel, listening with delight to the, evidently, trained voices, which were blending in really fine harmony.

They were her own people, who had thus come to wish her a merry Christmas ; and soon was there a request from them to see her, if she did not consider their asking it a liberty.

"How very kind ! Will you go with me to speak to them, Wymonde ?"

He drew her arm through his, and they quitted the room together. As they passed out, the Colonel, whose eye had followed them, said,

"Search broad England through, you would not find two happier human beings." Which unqualified assertion was followed by a general murmur of assent.

In the hall were assembled about a dozen of Mabel's people. Their spokesman stepped forward, and said,

“ We have made bold to come, Miss Somers, and wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year ; and to thank you for all your goodness to us, and to those belonging to us, for the bygone year ; and to hope that God will give you health and strength and a merry heart for the year to come.”

Roughly, but firmly, his words rung out. Sweeter than ever from the contrast, seemed her sweet rounded articulation, as she replied, “ I thank you very much indeed, for your kindness in coming this distance to express your good wishes. It is a great pleasure to me to feel that I have your good will ; and I hope I shall always have it. I beg to wish you in return a happy Christmas and new year ; and pray say the same for me to your wives and children at home.”

“ Thank you—thank you, Miss Somers. There is only one thing more to add ; and that is, that whatever service we could do for you—and willing service would it be, either by night or by day—we should also be glad to do for those that are dear to you.”

Pointedly did the man look at Wymonde as he spoke, and frankly and pleasantly did he give back his thanks for their courtesy to him.

Very pleasing was it to see the young and stately pair, standing before the rough men, receiving and returning kind wishes. Mabel, elegant and most lovely, was still very slight in her proportions; but he, on whose manly arm she leaned, was not slight; he had the aspect of one with both the will and the power to protect her; wore the look of one who would be an earthly tower of strength to his wife; as if, when *he* were beside her, harm could scarce come, reach her, when guarded by *his* presence.

"How very gratifying, is it not?" she asked, in a perfect glow of pleasure, as they ascended the stairs again. "You must always *let me* spend Christmas at Somerton; will you, Wymonde?"

"Nay—I make no promises till certain conditions are fulfilled," he said, firmly and steadily.

She heaved a great sigh. "I feel to be getting dreadfully afraid of you," and then she laughed merrily.

"Rebels are not treated with till they lay down their arms, and surrender at discretion, you must remember."

"Ah now, do tell me *which* of us is the rebel?" she asked, with the most provoking

demureness. "On the word of a lady, I know not which it be," she added as they entered the room again.

She preserved her rebellious aspect through the evening; not a thought of surrendering her position had she, spite of the lover's grave looks. As he stood lingering over his "Good night," she slipped a tiny packet into his hand.

Often had he importuned for a tress of hair; and there it was—long, glossy, silky; bound together with the slenderest gold-link work. Written by her own precious hand, was—

"For my beloved, from his beloved."

—— Bright and soft, too, dawned Christmas-day. Aged people shook their heads, and said,

"It boded no good when Christmas-time came round without frost and snow. A green Yule ever made a full churchyard."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Is't come to this, i' faith? Shall I never see
A bachelor of threescore again?"—SHAKSPEARE.

"I FEEL persuaded the Doctor is going to redeem his credit, and get married at last," observed the Colonel, some few days after Christmas; "you can't think how knowing I've got in these matters ever since Jane's affair put me on the *qui vive*. I was a dull ass over that, I confess. I found out something of the kind going on with Harry's youngest sister, and took an opportunity of speaking a good word for the young couple when I next saw Sir Francis. The girl hung on me, and almost cried herself ill afterwards. Poor thing! I felt sorry for her; the lover was a little frowned on, you know."

"By the way, Mabel, my dear, how is it you have never inquired after the Major? It's a *leetle* ungrateful; he often asks after you."

"*May* I ask, Wymonde? I should like to do."

"I have no objection," he returned, magnanimously.

"Well, dear uncle, is the Major married yet?"

"No, he is not; but I think he has overgot his disappointment: he never came near us for six months after you nonsuited him—was in quite a depressed way, I understood. Harry told me how downcast he was, so I advised him to let him know about your engagement with our young senator here, and the thing would then be put aside from his mind; and Harry did so. The Major took it in manly fashion enough, though he went very pale—very pale indeed. He said a good deal about your being too good for any mortal man,—talked a great deal of nonsense, in fact, more than I care to repeat, though it was excusable, you know, on the plea of his great regard for you. He wound up very handsomely by saying, that he had no doubt Mr. Barry was all that he ought to be, or you wouldn't have accepted him, though he put a tail-piece to it, about Mr. Barry not loving you any better than he himself did, let him be as devoted as he might."

Waggishly the Colonel smiled when he saw Wymonde perceptibly wince.

"He behaved exceedingly well. You know rejection *is* a test of a man's temper, and very well he has stood it; a downright good fellow at heart is John Berners, I am sure; he cer-

tainly loved you, Mabel ; fine, handsome, dashing soldier as he is, he would have given his right hand for your smile. But he looks quite cheerful again now, and often talks of you when he comes ; he drops in just as Harry used to do.⁸

“ Has he anything of the same errand, Colonel ? ” asked Wymonde, (it is to be afraid, spitefully.)

Had he received an electric shock the Colonel could not have recoiled more.

“ No—no, nothing of that sort ; though, thank you for the hint, Mr. Barry. I’ll just look into matters a little when I return.” He glanced at Nelly as he spoke ; the sight of her calm, sensible face, lighted up with animation and intelligence, as she sat conversing with Philip Abney, seemed to reassure him, and he went on—

“ Marcet has quite made up his mind to come home for your one-and-twentieth birthday, Mabel.”

“ I hope you will tell Lieutenant Colonel Vallancey, that Miss Somers’s marriage is also fixed for that day, Colonel,” said Wymonde.

“ Certainly I shall,” replied he.

Mabel tried to frown, but it softened down into a laugh.

"I shall appeal to Cousin Charles, whether this important day of my life is to be decided on without my having any voice in the matter."

"Don't trouble yourself about it, my love; he and I have talked it over, and he agrees with me, that it is an excellent arrangement."

Now it was Wymonde's turn to laugh, and laugh he did, and the Colonel joined him, and Mabel pouted, and pinched Wymonde's fingers between her pretty pink nails, till he was obliged to cry out for mercy.

"I am sure Lilies and Aunt Abney won't suffer me to be oppressed in this way," she said, in a querulous tone.

"Checkmated again, Mabel," cried the Colonel in irrepressible glee, "they are all against you."

"And saying, she would ne'er consent, consented," murmured Wymonde, in a low tone, and with an air of assured triumph.

"You leave me no resource but to quarrel with you all, and you first, disloyal lover."

"Do, my dear niece, you would find it very enlivening to the smoothness of your engagement," exclaimed the Colonel, who enjoyed the scene amazingly.

"I am teased past all endurance," she said,

as she turned away from them, and took a seat by Captain Malcolm. Scarce another smile did Wymonde win all the evening, though his eye was seeking hers, and pleading eloquently.

But he was not one to let the matter rest on its present footing. A distinct promise he must, and would have about this marriage-day, respecting which she was so recusant.

It was the next morning, they were alone together in her drawing-room, that he once more urged the subject.

Mabel listened, curiously investigating the setting of a bracelet, and the fitting of her sash slide, the while. Once or twice, she had printed a kiss upon his hand, then again she proffered her own ivory fingers to his lips, to divert his attention.

He, like Atalanta, tarried for the golden apples, but did not, like her, lose sight of his object; he resumed his arguments with a smile, for it was impossible to do other than feel amused with the woman's ingenuity she had displayed, in endeavouring to set aside and evade this discussion with him, now hesitating, anon giving a saucy answer, smiling, blushing, jesting, anything but reasoning with him.

"He was a very Shylock over his bond," she said.

"I look upon an engagement, Mabel, as being only like a preface to a book. Why tarry over it, when there is the book itself to be read, and its pleasant pages conned over?"

"Why are you in such a hurry, Wymonde? we are as happy as two human beings can possibly be. Now let me go and put on my habit? you forget that we were to ride with the Colonel at three." She took out her watch, "It is within a quarter of the time, now ta ta for a few minutes."

She rose from her chair, but Wymonde had hold of her hand, and he gently reseated her.

"The Colonel will excuse us, I am sure. *When* will you be pleased to fulfil your contract with me, Mabel? When shall you consider that I have waited long enough?"

"O some time of course, you may be sure."

"But *when*? give me some data to go on, my darling."

"It is really too soon to fix a period—remember, I yet lack six months of twenty."

"Then I will fix it for you, Mabel; we will decide on one-and-twenty."

"That would never do, O lover mine; I could not in that brief interval judge between

the contending claims of Bulegh Court, and the Lago di Garda."

"I could assist your judgment in the matter, perhaps."

"No—no, I should not wish assistance. Now, do let us drop the subject, it is quite a superfluous one at present, quite premature."

"I do not think so, Mabel. I desire to have a time specified, that my mind may rest on it; now, there is something vague about the prospect. Is there anything unreasonable in my wishing to have you with me always, to hear your pleasant voice, early and late; to feel the touch of this soft hand of yours, whensoever I will; to have your step making music, your smiles, light and gladness in my own home, *our* home, continually? Pardon me, love, if I look upon *that* seriously, which you treat as a jest."

Again she answered in a tone of *persiflage*, and Wymonde began to look grave. (Your earnest, decided men cannot brook anything that looks like trifling with them.)

"Have you *any reason* for wishing to delay our marriage, Mabel? If you have, tell me so, I will not ask *what* it is, or require you to communicate it to me, but I will drop the subject. Have you *any* reason for it?"

"I have not any at all, Wymonde, if I must tell you the very truth."

"Then I shall not flinch from my request, but repeat it," said he, with something like flashing anger in his look.

"I wonder you are not tired of this meagre subject, Wymonde, I am, very. Never have I seen you so persistent, so *uncomfortable* a person. You have given me back nothing but bitters for sweets, frowns for smiles. Now do let us resume our good temper, and start our ride," she added coaxingly, and trying the magic of another imprint on his hand.

More of the same nature passed. Flushed and troubled had grown Mabel's face; still, no word of accession to his wish had yet escaped her. Slender chance was there, judging by his countenance, that *he* would give way; compressed was his fine cut, handsome mouth, resolved his brow and eye, firm and unyielding sounded every accent of his voice.

"Low and sad enough was its tone," as he said,

"I will not for a moment suggest the possibility of cooled affection, Mabel, on your—"

"Treason—treason, and *from you!*" she cried, and stamped her little foot upon the floor in quivering agony.

Soon—I know not how it was—a graceful head lay on the lover’s breast, and a flushed, anxious face, whose sweet eyes were seen through quick-gathering, and quick-falling tears, was to his uplifted.

Neither know I how he, the lover, fulfilled the bidding of the tremulously earnest voice, which said, “ Kiss me, and forgive me, Wymonde, I have been wholly wrong.”

“ Now that we are quite happy again, have everything settled and decided. I should like you, my sweet one, to tell me what it is which has prompted you into such steady opposition ; I have never once caught sight of the lever or spring setting it all in movement.”

“ Nay—but you would laugh, Wymonde.”

“ Let me laugh then.”

“ Well, if I *must* tell you, it has been a vague sort of dread of your ceasing to care for me as much when we were married as you do now ; of love growing indifferent ; as it got accustomed ; I was living now in a sort of rainbow world.—There, I see the laugh coming, I knew you would laugh at me.”

“ Well I may. Am I never to break my love-forged fetters ? *always* to be humbly waiting ? ”

“ I have had a specimen of your humble

waiting, have I not, this morning? But now, I suppose, there really *must* come a change after marriage; every one says so. The gold, and purple, and azure all fade into dull grey. So it was just womanish fear of this change coming—desire to keep it back for some more months, or may be another year—which made me turn such a deaf ear to you. Now, laugh if you will; I know it has been foolish and absurd.”

Inexpressible fondness filled his gaze upon her.

“O silly—silly child,” he said. “A faint and coward heart has this sweet and winning love of mine. She fears shadows, and shapes apparitions, and shrinks from phantasms which have no name or place save in her own tender woman’s soul. Bethink you not, my timorous bird, that though spring *must* ripen into summer, and the mellow autumn come, yet in one bland and balmy season we care not that the early April freshness hath departed.”

“But the other season—winter, *that* must also come,” she said, with serious eye and tone.

“But need not be the ‘winter of our discontent,’ my love. What though it cometh; we are no earth-bound prisoners, no lingerers

under harsh and mournful skies, no tombèd victims, swathed with pale winding-sheets in graves, where love, and youth, and hope lie buried with us. Immortals, with expanded wing we rise, and cleave our way to golden shores, where winter never cometh. There—yes *there*, my love, my bride, my wife, will our love re-light and live again.—But I shall get moralizing if I go on; get talking like your pet clergyman does.”

“Don’t imperil yourself by saying one single disrespectful word of Philip,” exclaimed Mabel, threatening him with her finger the while.

“I’m sadly tempted to make you buckle on your armour, and do battle for him,” said he, laughing.

“No—no, Wymonde, you must not; it quite teases me, that you and he do not get on together; I think it cannot be his fault, he is so very gentle and excellent.”

“Add ‘repellent,’ and then I’ll altogether agree with you. But don’t pout, you naughty child; I was only jesting. I will like everybody that you bid me.”

And before they parted, Mabel must be told (for she was very curious about it), what it was which had incited *him* to urge her in such un-lover-like fashion, to what she did

not wish; was it desire to see how far his power extended? was it love of domination? was it obstinate dislike to allow her to have any will at all? What was it?"

"Not any of those reasons was it," said Wymonde, who hesitated, and tried to set the question aside.

"Tell me, and tell me true; for I will know," she exclaimed, with all her usual sparkle coming back. So then he told that to a nonsensical dream she owed it all.

"To a dream!" she said, in accents of surprise.

"Yes, it 'rests on the baseless fabric of a dream.' You must ask me none of the questions that I see gathering on your lips; I may perhaps, after our marriage, tell you something concerning it, but nothing now."—

"And now come, rest you here once more; nestle your head close to me, so; lace your hands in mine, and gaze at me; then dive into your heart, and tell me whether *it* goes with this promise that you have given me.—Remember the motto of your house, 'The truth alway.'—Now what see you? Is there any lurking reluctance or fear?—If so, I will not hold you to it. I believe I was getting suspicious, jealous; but the stinging, scourging

fiend hath now lost all his power. Neither unreasonable nor ungenerous *would* I be with my betrothed, my heart-beloved."

"Once more, what see you? One timid, fearful, shrinking?"

"I do not, Wymonde. I see one giving her hand, with her heart in it, on the day she is twenty-one."

"But will this be a joyful, happy bride, my Mabel?"

"She will—she will. None happier do ever give themselves away."

• Burning was the kiss; fervid the embrace.

"Then on that day she *shall* fulfil her promise to me."

CHAPTER IX.

"Wealth to the good, to all the world is gain."

Household Words.

ALL met late at breakfast, the morning after a crowded assembly at Lady Musgrave's, of Templeton.

It is surely a pleasant thing to dawdle over the morning meal, and gossip about the people you have met the preceding evening, when that evening has been an agreeable one.

Mabel was not expected to make her appearance, for she had danced as if her blood was flowing to a dancing measure, and set fatigue at defiance. It was really marvellous; she looked as fresh in the last dance, her colour as deep, her eyes as lustrous, as on first entering the room.

"Why, bless me, the child's blooming like a rose," was the Colonel's exclamation, as he shook hands with her. "I took it for granted you would breakfast in bed this morning, Miss Mabel."

"I tried in vain to persuade her," said

Mrs. Abney, "but she was quite wilful about it."

"I am sure no well-wisher of mine would desire me to lie in bed, if they knew what a grievous punishment it was to me," replied Mabel, who was busy chattering with Jane and Harry about an Indian judge, whom she "was quite sure had paid Jane great attention," she said.

"I was horribly bored with him at first," laughed Jane; but he heard some one mention Colonel Vallancey, and asked me 'if I knew whether he were at all related to a Lieutenant-Colonel Vallancey in India, whom *he* knew? And we had so much talk about Marcet (for he has met him several times) and spake in such warm praise of him, that I was almost ready to weep. Indeed, my Indian judge is a delightful person."

"She was so engrossed with him, that she never perceived me sauntering near several times, Miss Somers; so I thought it only right to go and interrupt the *tête-à-tête*," said Captain Harry; "and I took care to speak in that *brusque* sort of way which quickly showed him, that the lady was my property. His countenance fell immediately."

"Harry spoke like a husband, Mabel, he

did indeed. *You* never heard anything so imperious as his voice. He treats me abominably : he does not suffer me to waltz with any one save himself ; and then when I sit out, he will not permit any one to talk to me for five minutes together,—not even an old Indian judge. I dare say that poor dear man had sacks full of pearls and diamonds, somewhere."

"How *do* husbands speak, Jane?" asked Mabel, with a very inquiring countenance.

"In exactly the reverse way to what lovers do, my dear," said Jane, laughing unrestrainedly.

"It is not possible you deny your wife the waltz, Captain Malcolm?" questioned Lillas, with a mischievous sparkle which boded *him* no good.

"Oh no, certainly not: Jane may waltz with *me* as much as she pleases."

"But limiting it to that is virtually denying it to her."

"Well, I must say, Mrs. Ferrand, I could not brook seeing my wife's waist encircled by any gay *gallant* who chose to fancy that she would make a sprightly partner for the dance."

"It was a very natural feeling—she did

not wonder at it at all," responded Lillas, with an innocent, drawing-on sort of look and manner.

"Take care of the geese when the fox preaches," called out Charles from the other end of the table. "Malcolm, my good fellow, mind what you are about."

A steady stare round, by way of confronting his enemies, did Captain Harry give: the look settled at last on Lillas, who was suddenly seized by such an overpowering inclination to laugh, that either looks or words were wholly thrown away upon her. Most infectious was her mirth: the Colonel joined her; Jane, every one of the party save Harry himself, who looked excessively piqued.

"I tell you what, Captain," said Charles, at length, "by the time you have been wedded half-a-dozen years, you will be only too glad to leave these minor morals of marriage to take their luck, provided only you can keep the reins in your own hands, for more important matters."

"It is really quite refreshing to come across a jeal——, so particular a husband in these indifferent days," observed Lillas. "Mine never honoured me by caring who I danced with, even in his greenest days."

And again her mirth pealed out, and again all joined her. There was something irresistible in it.

"There is nothing so fatiguing as excessive laughter," she said, pressing her hand upon her side, whilst she once more indulged in a hearty peal,—“nothing half so tiring. I beg your pardon, Captain Malcolm: it is shamefully rude; but it really is so very funny of you, that I must beg you to hold me excused. I *cannot* help it, though I do try. By the way, I fancied there was a great amount of flirtation going on last night, not reckoning Indian judge at all.”

“I beseech you to have mercy, Mrs. Ferrand,” exclaimed Harry, whose face had become very crimson with the trimming he had got.

“I have not done with you yet, I assure you, Captain, though I am content to let it drop for a little.”

“Why, Nelly, my dear, what Mrs. Ferrand says reminds me of you and that blue-jacket gentleman keeping so close together. *What* were you talking about, ha? Was he teaching you sea-phrases, or what might it be?” asked the Colonel.

Cool and comfortable looked Nelly, as she

replied, that she had learned nothing new from her companion. But soon did a mantling colour come, when he said something malicious about her natural instincts, and aptitude for acquiring knowledge.

"If Nelly takes lessons, I fancy it will be from the Order book," observed Captain Harry, determined to pay some one off for his own discomfiture.

Keen was the glance the Colonel darted at her; but Nelly had suddenly commenced talking to Mabel with great vivacity.

As they rose from table, Charles said,—

"Mabel, you may come to the Colonel and I in the library, in the course of an hour or so."

"When you say that 'I may,' do you mean that I *must*, Cousin?" she innocently inquired.

"Even so, Miss Somers."

"Then I shall not be able to walk with you, Wymonde, as I promised."

"What shall you and I do with ourselves this morning; Mr. Barry?—none of the ladies are going out: we shall be thrown upon our own resources."

"Will you allow *me* to suggest an employment, Captain Malcolm?" said Lilius.

"I shall feel only too flattered," he responded, with a nevertheless, dubious look upon her.

"Then what say you to the composition of a Thesis on the waltz and its enormities?"

"Mrs. Ferrand—Mrs. Ferrand," he remonstrated, as the laugh again rose. But Lilius was gone: triumphantly she had flung out of the room, on discharging that last arrow from her woman's quiver.

Jane began to look quite distressed with what she had brought upon her husband. "It was all owing to that horrid Indian judge," she whispered him. "She was so sorry—so sorry: she could almost wish the poor dear man was in the Ganges."

"Don't let Captain Malcolm indoctrinate *you*, Wymonde, whilst I am away—I *could not* be denied dancing, you know," said Mabel.

"I am quite sure he will think with me, Miss Somers," observed Captain Harry; "it is all very well till you are his wife; but *then* he will deny it to you, as I do to Jane."

"Hush, Captain Malcolm, I shall fetch Mrs. Ferrand to you. I cannot think it, indeed. Why do you not speak, Wymonde, and tell the Captain he is quite wrong?"

Wymonde had assumed what Mabel called "his parliamentary look," and *would not* be persuaded to pledge himself to any express line of conduct whatever.

And here came Mabel's page to summon her to the library.

Covered with bills and documents was the table, where Charles was sitting mending a pen. The Colonel was standing before the fire, his arms crossed behind him, one foot planted firmly before the other, in true military fashion. He was briskly humming some air from a favourite opera of his.

"Sit down, Miss Somers, I beg," said he, with that bland, and gracious look and manner, which won him instantaneous goodwill from all women, and from most men; so perfectly did it testify to the fine, frank, most upright, generous nature of him with whom they had come in contact.

"Take this chair; and here's a hassock for your little feet, or will you put them on the fender as Mrs. Ferrand does, when she means to be comfortable? There, shall you do now?"

"Quite, quite, Colonel, thank you," answered Mabel, settling herself into comfort, and a position of attention at the same time.

The Colonel again planted himself before



the fire, glancing at Mr. Ferrand as he did so ; but Charles had never once taken his eyes from that impracticable quill, which cut, cut as he might, would not suffer itself to be fashioned into a good pen.

“ Ahem ! ” said the Colonel ; and then came a pause. “ We were sorry to deprive you of your walk, my love, such a pleasant day as it is ; but business *must* be looked into, sometimes.”

“ Yes—yes ; ” came from Mabel.

Another embarrassed pause ; another glance at Charles (oh, that tiresome, tiresome quill), and the Colonel nerved himself to break the ice ; he saw plainly enough Charles did not mean to do it.

“ Well, my dear, we of course had something to say to you, or we should not have wished your presence. The long and the short of the matter is, Mabel, Charles and I are not *quite* satisfied with the way you are going on.”

“ Not satisfied with the way I am going on,” repeated Mabel, slowly, with eyes that dilated as they fixed upon him ; with the quick blood mounting up to her temples, and with a look of surprise, almost horror. “ What do you—can you mean ? ” she stammered out.

“ Bless the child ; she looks frightened to

death!" exclaimed the Colonel, wholly turned aside from his purpose by his quick sympathy, as he stooped down to pat her cheek and kiss her forehead with fatherly tenderness; but Mabel rose from her chair, hid her face on his arm, and burst into tears.

"I don't know what you mean," she sobbed out. The pen was made at last, and Charles having gained the mastery over it, pitched it triumphantly into the fire, and prepared to take his part in the conversation.

"Don't distress yourself, dear Mabel, there is not the slightest occasion for it," he said, very kindly. "What we had to name to you was purely a matter of business—monetary, in fact."

"Aye, my dear, how *do* you dispose of all the money that you draw?"

"Is *that* all?" she asked, lifting up a tearful, but yet smiling face to them; "I thought I had been guilty, or *you* thought I had, of something flagrant."

"Is that all? she asks,—as if it were the merest trifle," said the Colonel, giving her back as beaming a smile as her own. "Is it *nothing*, young lady, that you spend thousands a-year?"

"I could not get on at all without plenty of

money," she replied, in the most *naïf* manner possible.

"But I am afraid you *must* manage to get on with a more diminished expenditure than this year's, Mabel," said Charles; "a large income like yours is expected to accumulate largely during a minority; and we shall be considered blameworthy that yours has not done so to a much greater extent than it has, or seems likely to do."

"We are almost afraid we shall have to limit you, my love; as you are turning out so extravagant."

"Oh, Colonel, that would never do. It would be intolerable to feel that I could not spend as I wished."

"The child has no more idea of the value of money than the babe unborn," parenthesised the Colonel. "Well, I can only tell you that you will ruin Mr. Barry quickly, if you go on in the sameway after you are married as you do now. I shall deem it only my duty to give him a friendly hint about your extravagance beforehand."

"You must not, indeed, make mischief between us, dear uncle," said Mabel, coaxingly, but looking excessively amused at the idea of ruining Wymonde.

"Well but, my dear, be reasonable; else;

rich as you both are—too rich almost for such young people—you will certainly be reduced to bankruptcy and beggary.”

This was too much. Mabel’s laugh rose unrestrainedly, and the Colonel began to look almost cross: even Charles Ferrand, who, generally speaking, was as ready to enter into a jest and indulge his mirth at it, as any one, put on a surprised countenance, and drew a lot of bills towards him.

“The Colonel and I have waded all through these bills, Mabel, in the vain expectation of discovering how you have expended your money—it is better to come to the point—but we can in no way make it out; there is nothing out of the way at all about *them*; yet the checks upon your banker *are* out of the way. You perhaps are not aware that you have left very little balance in his hands.”

“I was *not* aware, cousin,” said Mabel, scarcely composed even yet; “I thought I was very rich.”

“And so you are, my dear; and that makes the thing so mysterious, that you could by any possibility get through such a sum. If you had been in the habit of bedizening yourself with thousand-pound necklaces, why, of course, we should not have wondered at your

money flying ; but your tastes do not seem to lie in overmuch dress and decoration. Still the money has gone. Here are upwards of two thousand pounds, for which, after summing up bills, charities, everything in fact, there is not a scrap of paper, or memorandum of any kind to account. What *can* you have done with it ? I strongly suspect you have been playing ' chuck-farthing,' or ' shying ducks and drakes in the water' with gold pieces."

" I have not, indeed," said Mabel, again laughing.

" You must not forget, Mabel, that we shall resign our stewardship of your affairs, and must give exact account of everything concerning them, on the day you are one-and-twenty,"—" Aye, it will be a busy day," interjected the Colonel, with a comic look and smile ;—" I am sure you are quite too just-minded to lay us open to censure by any want of candour on your part ; though I fear we have already been censurable in leaving so much in your own hands." Steadily did Charles regard her as he spoke.

There was a lengthened pause ; the Colonel exchanged looks with Charles, in very natural surprise, at Mabel's obvious reluctance to go into the matter.

"Come, my dear, we are waiting for this confession of yours; make a clean breast of it without any more delay."

"I wish you would take my word for it that it has been properly spent; that it has not been frittered foolishly away," at length came slowly from her.

"It is quite impossible that we can be satisfied with so vague a statement; our duty requires us to learn *what* you have done with it," said Charles, promptly and decidedly.

Another embarrassed pause followed, and the Colonel took out his watch.

"I give you ten minutes longer, Miss Mabel, and if the whole truth is not told by that time, I shall ring for Mr. Barry, and inform him about your extravagance before your face; you need not put on that deprecating look, for he shall know it, as he ought."

"Colonel, Colonel!" she exclaimed, flushing up.

"There are five minutes gone;" he stretched out his hand towards the bell-rope. "What are you going to do now?" he asked, as Mabel rose from her chair.

"It is needful I should fetch something, if I *must* tell you. I promise you faithfully to return, and give an account of myself."

"Off with you, then."

She quickly returned, bearing in her hand a little velvet-bound memorandum-book, with gold pencil, and all complete; and proffered it to them.

"You will not find it very lucid, I dare say; but it will give you some little idea of what I have done with the money. Now, may I go? I would rather not stay whilst you look it over."

Embarrassment, almost to pain, was depicted in her face.

"Sit down, Miss Somers, if you please."

Mabel bit her lip, but sat down as she was directed, whilst her two guardians turned over leaf after leaf. Charles drew a standish towards him, and rapidly penned down memorandums, figures, copying from the little book; and after exchanging a few sentences with the Colonel in an under tone, commenced summing up. A little more conversation between them; then, without turning round in the least, Charles put the question—

"How did all these things come under your notice, Miss Somers?"

"Newspapers," was the terse reply.

"That accounts for your parloining all the papers, then," was his rejoinder.

Many a laugh and jest had there been at Beechwood about Mabel stealing the newspapers; constantly were they missed, as constantly to be found on Miss Somers's drawing-room tables. Of course, it opened the door to the belief that her desire to see her lover's name amid the Parliamentary debates was the cause of it; strengthened, too, by the fact, that she always coloured violently when rallied about this *penchant* of hers for the earliest news, and the latest. She always professed great admiration of the *Times* leaders; but, as Mr. Ferrand remarked—

“Miss Somers had a thoroughly impartial and liberal mind—liked to see every side of a question; for papers of the most diverse opinions and politics were to be found in very amicable juxtaposition in her private apartments.”

But not for the sake of *Times* leaders alone, nor yet for the purpose of reading Parliamentary debates, had been her abstraction of newspapers; but that she might make acquaintance with poverty, that was crying aloud—with necessity, that could not wait—with wolf-eyed want, that said, Give, Give!

And she had given—Herself unknown; she had ministered of her substance, to the amount of thousands.

The guardians turned and confronted her at last; very shy and uncomfortable looked Mabel, as if she desired, of all things, to make her escape from *them*, and what was coming, dared she do so.

"Well, Miss Somers, your charities are certainly on a munificent scale," commenced the Colonel.

"I thought my large means were given me that I might do good," she said, hesitatingly enough.

"So they were, my dear; and neither Charles nor I are going to scold you in the least, though we should like you to limit yourself to a certain specified amount for the future; and, of course, you will do so, as we wish it. And now, come here, my pet, and tell me whether there is another as good a girl as yourself to be found anywhere in the world."

"Don't surfeit her with praise for any sake," cried Charles; "Barry spoils her, till she does not know what to do with herself."

"No! does he really, Mabel? Fetch him in, and we will scold him properly; *he* shall have what we meant to give you."

"Certainly not for such a purpose as that," she said, "will I ask him to come."

"Well, fetch him, at all events; my dear, we must speak about this matter to him, as you are now his property, to all intents and purposes, though still Mabel Somers."

"Then I need not return with him?"

"Not unless you wish."

"I don't wish; I am only too glad to get away from you. Never have I seen you and Cousin Charles so unpleasant and cross as this morning," she said, laughingly, as she was quitting the room.

The Colonel told her "she was an ungrateful lass," and called her back to say, "that he should himself take possession of the little gold-embossed memorandum-book, and keep it for her sake: she might get another."

"And begin making entries in it, of course?" she asked.

"Of *yes* certainly: keeping in the present habit. Now, send this lover of yours home to-day: don't stand loitering with him to-day at home indulging in *idlesse* and non-sense: he is waiting."

* * * *

"To our next merry meeting," was the toast he should give the night before the whole household left Birchwood. The toast flew up—"To our next merry meeting."

"I hope we shall have many merry meetings before Christmas comes again, Colonel," said Mabel.

"I hope so, my love; and I hope they will all be as social and as hearty as this present prolonged meeting has been. I am sure we are all bound to thank God devoutly for health and strength, and great comfort of mind at this time. I have seen but one face which I could have wished to see looking differently, and that one belongs to my esteemed young friend, Philip Abney; he is quite changed. I have had much conversation with him, but can make nothing out. I am afraid, Mabel, that Somerton does not suit him."

Quite aghast looked Mabel.

"I hope, uncle, he does not want to leave us?"

"No, as far as I can gather, he does not; I don't know at all what to recommend you to do: you see, even such a young, smiling heiress as you cannot have everything your own way. But it may be only some temporary depression, which will pass away. I hope it will. I was sounding the Doctor about him, one day, for I thought he *might* know something; but however, if he did, he did not

choose to tell me; he said, though, how wonderfully better Philip seemed after his return from abroad."

"So he did," rejoined Mrs. Abney.

"Well, then, I would order him off again, Mabel—give him a year's furlough."

"Anything—anything that would do Philip good; he is so devoted, and so self-forgetting a creature."

A *very* tender heart had Mabel, the tears sprung into her eyes as she thought of Philip's pale, dejected face; the Colonel saw them, (for what was there the Colonel did *not* see), and he said something about a dear, soft-hearted child, as he smiled at her.

"Pray, how does my ward manage her partings with you, Mr. Barry? they are sad, overwhelming affairs, I suppose, are not they? There now, you see, I've made the colour come; what! is the puss afraid of the naughty lover betraying the secrets of the prison-house? Never mind, Mabel, we'll ostracize him if he does."

"The Good-bye is got through more philosophically now, than it was at first, I think, Mr. Barry," said Lillas, with a provoking laugh; "they were moving in the extreme, for a time."

"They moved *me* very much, Mrs. Ferrand, I confess," answered Wymonde; "I would gladly have put an end to them, if it had lain in my power."

"Doubtless—doubtless, Sir, you would," chimed in the Colonel; "what sort of a howling wilderness of a world this would be, without the witchery of women's smiles and tears, I cannot tell. Woman is better than man; she has less of that grovelling selfhood at her heart. None love and honour the sex more than I do; and it angers me to hear any speak in terms of dispraise—it's mean, it's contemptible—the man deserves to be kicked out of society who can do it. Poor puny souls they must be, and 'rotten at the core.'"

"So *I* think," said Wymonde, with much emphasis. "And so *I* think," added Captain Harry.

"I'll say nothing," said Charles Ferrand, "for my wife's eyes are fixed upon me in the most insufferable and audacious manner, possible. I'll pay no compliment to the sex, lest she should take it to herself, when I do not mean it to extend to her."

Merrily laughed Liliás; it rather diverted her from Captain Harry, whom she had been

rallying again, unmercifully, about Jane's prohibited waltzing.

The Colonel commenced afresh.

"Now, Mr. Barry," he said, "as we are got to our last evening, must decamp on the morrow with bag and baggage, let me tell you, Sir, how I rejoice to hear that you, as well as my ward, are disposed to take a just view of your position, as a landowner, and possessor of considerable property—as one having the welfare and well-being of many depending upon you. Don't think, Sir, that I am going to preach (I leave that to my excellent friend, Philip), neither, Sir, to point out your duties; one who can make as good speeches as you do in the House, cannot be supposed, for a moment, to be ignorant that talking well, is not to be put in the scale with doing well. I repeat, Sir, that I rejoice in the belief, that *you* will *do* well; that in you, the poor, the wretched, the ignorant, will find a friend. It is a world of work and uses; out upon the man who worketh not either with head or hand—he is a weed on the highway of life, no vacant place leaveth he when he is pulled up.

"The worst thing about you, Sir, is your political creed; frankly, I should be glad if you

could see the questions of the day in a different light ; if you would uphold different men, different measures. I am myself a mild, comfortable Conservative ; I should like to see every man with a decent house, a decent coat, and plenty to eat ; and as far as that goes, you are of the same way of thinking as myself, no doubt. Now, Sir, I shall be generous and forgive your Liberalism, if I find, as time goes on, that you settle yourself upon the broad basis of Usefulness in your day and generation ; if you root up thorns, pull up thistles, and scatter seeds of good.

“Did the employers, the landlords—each and all in their allotted sphere, work their proper work ; did they influence, and give the tone as they so easily might, to those under them ; we should not know the world : we should see squalor, and immorality, and disgusting dirt, exchanged for health, and decency, and cleanliness, which is next to godliness. It is a shame, nay, it is a sin, to house the poor, who minister to our necessities, worse than we do our hounds and horses. Look at the light, airy places *they* inhabit ; see how well fed, how groomed and exercised they are ; then cast a glance at the herding-places of the poor—they breathe foul air, they have

none but foul water, they have foul bodies, and foul associates ; and then we maunder and cry out, because we find they have foul souls.

“I have, I confess it, great hopes of you, Mr. Barry. I believe you are a promising young man, spite of the wrong bias you have got. You have set out well, and, with this good girl by your side to work with you, and cheer you with her smiles on the way, I think a very honourable future lies before you. But look to your poor, Sir; care for the root of the tree ; value the poor man’s blessing. We are all the better for it, Sir, living or dying. Don’t let him flag, Mabel, nor be a lazy, sauntering fellow over his duties. With that voice of yours, sweeter to him than shawms and cymbals, draw him and encourage him on the right path. He will find—you will both of you find—that unspeakable blessings rest upon it.”

He placed his hand on Mabel’s, as it rested on the table beside him, ere he proceeded.

“For this dear child, who belongs to us all, I can only say, that if *he* who was so suddenly called from us, and whose loss can never be supplied, could see the way she is fulfilling her duties, he would multiply benedictions on her head. Look up, look up, Mabel, you are

worthy to be his daughter : I say it before all—for all know it and would say it with me. There, *you* had best console her, Mr. Barry ; I did not intend to make the tender child weep.”——

“ I hope my son Harry is not leaving without recording his thanks to you, Mrs. Ferrand, for all the whippings you have given him ? ” the Colonel briskly asked, the next morning, as, ’midst a bewildering bustle and handshaking, the Farewells were taking place.

“ He is indeed, Colonel ! ”

“ Out upon him for a worthless, thankless fellow. Ah, my dear ! Good-bye—Good-bye ! I’ve got the little memorandum-book quite safe. And though I shall not keep it under my pillow, as, I dare say, that lover of yours does with the locks of hair, and all the little toying things you give him, yet I shall make very much of it nevertheless, as I do of her whose writing is in it——Goodbye, Mr. Barry ; take good care of her, Sir ; you’ll not come across a better on this side Heaven’s gate, I can tell you, Sir ! ”

“ None know it so well as I, Colonel,” said the lover, as, with a fond, proud look, he drew her arm through his.

“ And, mark ye ! Nelly shall hold herself in

readiness for June twelvemonth, when we shall all be called upon to—

‘Come and merrily dance and sing,
Whilst the bridal bells do ring.’

“We are talking no secrets, Miss Mabel, so you need not turn away in that dignified fashion. Bless me! how the child blushes,” he exclaimed, as, laughing most provokingly, he sprang into the carriage, and waved an adieu to them all.

The Doctor had only waited the departure of the guests from Beechwood, ere he sought an interview with Mabel, to communicate to her the happy fact, that Madame von Bunsen had done him the honour to accept his hand. Consequently there would, in seven or eight months’ time, be a vacancy in the Memorial. Madame was inexorable — two years *must* elapse from the date of her husband’s death, ere she would wed again.

“Well, I have no doubt you will be a very happy man, Doctor. I am quite delighted to think what a pleasant, social circle we shall have at Somerton. I do not care how often we have vacancies, so that they are created by our widows marrying.”

“You are become a great friend to marriage,” said the Doctor, with an arch glance.

Mabel laughed, and inquired "Who was to inform Miss Earle of his engagement?" And also asked, "*How* he had at length found the requisite time for wooing, and the usual preliminaries?"

To which the Doctor frankly confessed, "that he should, at his very busiest, have found leisure to marry Madame, if she could or would have had him."

Another smile from Mabel, as she told him, "that he must also find leisure for filling up the vacancy in the Memorial (at which the Doctor looked much gratified), and an inquiry, "Whether his secret was to become known? She was afraid she should not be able to keep it!"

"I shall be much indebted if you will tell it for me."

"It's delicious to see you look so shy, Doctor! I *will* tell it with the greatest good will!"

So Mrs. Abney was sent for to learn the tidings, which did not surprise her in the least, "but pleased her very much," she said, as she congratulated him with much vivacity, adding, "That the next pleasant thing to be learned respecting him, was, that he had become a convert to Homœopathy."

“Bah! Nonsense, my dear Madam! I’m not going to wear cap and bells to please anybody!”——

Even Homœopathic talk would not ruffle the Doctor’s feathers now.

There had been an agreeable young man, a Lieutenant Falkland, making one of a Christmas-tide party at the house of a pleasant family in the vicinity of Beechwood, a family with which the Ferrands were on intimate terms; visits had been interchanged during the Lieutenant’s stay, and his bearing being quiet and unaffected, he was welcomed when he called occasionally without his friends, or dropped in to Lilius’s drawing-room without any specific invitation to do so.

Wonderfully quick of observation in *some* matters, had Mabel become; and she began, from sundry symptoms, to suspect that there was something more than mere friendliness prompting the Lieutenant’s visits. She saw how nervously his eye watched the door, when Miss Lancaster was not in the room, and how it rested on her when she did come; and she also noted, what was most suspicious of all, that Leonora was apt to colour when he addressed her; that pure complexion of hers betraying it past all denial.

Now, Mabel had somehow got to take great interest in all love affairs ; so, woman-like, she set herself to work over this, to foster it, and nurse it, and fan it into flame, if so be, there were no adverse currents to run counter and extinguish it. *Those* must not be, for Leonora's sake, who had already experienced so much scandalous treatment. It was possible that Lieutenant Falkland might be another Riverstone Dysart ; and Leonora had no father nor brother to advise with, and her mother was far off ; so there was nothing for it but for Mabel's self to care for her—and care for her she would.

Aye, that she would ! and her red lips compressed together, and her eyes shot out an indignant ray, as the bare suspicion flashed across her mind, that he *might* merely contemplate a little idle amusement with that pretty governess of Mrs. Ferrand's.

Wymonde was seized with an irrepressible fit of laughter, when told what she required of him : that he must immediately, for love of her, see into this matter of Leonora's,—learn all about the Lieutenant, his prospects, his character, everything, in short.

“ But Mabel—Mabel, child, what business

is it of mine?" he asked, when his mirth was exhausted a little.

"It's yours because it's mine, don't you see? To think that you should want telling *that*! I'll not have Leonora vexed, Wymonde, I won't indeed; and I am quite sure that he is paying her secret attention."

"Well, I did never think to have assisted at any marriage-making save my own," exclaimed Wymonde. "I'm absolutely dismayed at the task you have set me."

"'Tis all for love of me, my lover," she said, as she presented him her blue veins to kiss.

"So fell the first man," observed the lover, as he pressed the hand, kissed it, and thereupon hungering, kissed it again.

"And so will fall the last," was her arch rejoinder, as, lifting her glance to his, she bade him take the payment of his obedience from her lips: "'twas pre-payment," she said, "but 'twas no matter."

Wymonde, of course, set himself to work, and the information gained was, as far as it went, satisfactory. And Mabel avowed her determination to go on throwing facilities in the Lieutenant's way, with such a positive air, that it brought back Wymonde's ungovernable mirth.

“ If the Lieutenant did but know under what surveillance he is placed, how his wooing is watched, I am quite sure he would run off in dismay. I am sorely tempted to give him a hint, Mabel, as to how he is getting hemmed in to the ‘primrose path of matrimony.’ Miss Lancaster smiling in the gentle distance ; you on one side, I on the other, to uphold him, should his step fail or falter.”

“ I don’t think it will do : he is pursuing the path most resolutely : I believe—

‘ That he thinks of her at morn ; and he thinks of her at even.’ ”

Invaluable is a third party in love affairs ; and wonderfully did Mabel smooth matters for this one. So impressed with a belief in the Lieutenant’s sincerity did she become, that she at length took Liliast into her confidence ; who, of course, immediately let Charles into the secret ; who was no little startled and annoyed by the intelligence. He sharply scolded Liliast, and cross-examined Mabel, with a very reproofing air, respecting her share of the business.

“ The Lieutenant was going away in two or three days, and there has been nothing said ; and by next week he will have forgotten Miss Lancaster’s very existence, and she will be sighing and pining with another love-disap-

pointment (I wonder how many of them she has had). I desire, Liliás, that you never engage another pretty governess." (Some impertinence or other was heard from Liliás's direction, about engaging the pig-faced lady, if it so pleased him.) "I *must* say, I am very much annoyed : my house will acquire an ill name, if it becomes known that plots for inveigling young men into marriage are formed and carried on in it."

"Poor, innocent lambs !" exclaimed Liliás, turning up her beautiful eyes, with a look of pious horror.

But, for once in his life, Charles was mistaken, as a very earnestly-worded letter, received from the Lieutenant that same day, convinced him. Leonora was summoned to the library, to have the letter placed in her hands, which she read, colouring and growing pale in quick succession.

"Well, what am I to say to the Lieutenant's modest request to be allowed to come here as your permitted suitor, Miss Lancaster?" he asked, with a smile.

"Whatever you think best, Sir," was the faltering reply.

"Nay, *that* is scarcely definite instruction enough. I must learn how your wishes point,

as a certain degree of either encouragement or the reverse *must* be couched in my answer to him."

"Say that you will be glad to see him," she stammered out.

"That he will be welcomed by us *all*—shall I tell him that?"

She bowed her head in token of acquiescence.

"Very well, *that* will do. The Lieutenant will understand it, no doubt."

He *did* understand it, and soon made his appearance at Beechwood, where he was received with general good-will by the whole party. A smile, bright as a sunbeam, met him from Mabel, who had waxed quite triumphant about the affair.

"Well, now, as Miss Lancaster will be leaving us by-and-by," quoth Lillas, "had I not better be setting inquiries on foot for an ugly governess? Would you prefer one vividly ugly, or—"

"Have done, you tiresome woman!" exclaimed Charles: "let there be peace between us."

CHAPTER X.

"Fondnesse it were for any being free,
To covet fetters, though they golden bee."

Faerie Queen.

FESTIVE and animated was the scene in the shire-hall of the county-town of D——, on a wintry night in January ;—gay, as brilliant lighting and tasteful decoration, pouring-out music-strains, elegant-looking women, and well-dressed men, could make it. 'Twas the night of the annual assembly ; and the room was crowded. Dancing had commenced some time. Lazily leaning against some crimson window-drapery, stood a tall, elegantly formed, eagle-eyed young man, of some seven or eight and twenty years. He looked foreign,—at least, none of the ruddiness of the Anglo-Saxon race tinted his cheek ; though it might be that much travel had embrowned a naturally clear complexion. Negligent and careless as he stood, yet was it not possible to mistake the man of birth and breeding : the noble, aristocratic cast of head, the fine-moulded, delicate

hand, the easy air of superiority, at once proclaimed it.

An oval, well-featured face, with a great look of—not arrogance, but boldness, daring, attracted the gaze; something was there in the expression of the curved and scornful upper lip, in the large, dark, proud, flashing eyes, which would not let you pass its owner by. Yet was it far enough from an unpleasing face; one, that a smile would light up into softness and positive beauty; a countenance that would vary with the passing mood,—sparkling with the sunshine, lowering with the shade.

Thoroughly given up to *ennui* did he now look, as he turned to address a slight, pale young man standing beside him.

“What time does this dreary farce come to an end?” he asked, with raised eyebrows and sarcastic voice.

English, undoubtedly, you knew him to be, when he spoke; his diction was fine and good, his voice rung out clear and sonorous.

“It has but just begun, my good fellow,” was the reply, accompanied by a light laugh.

“Um! Well! my powers of endurance are not equal to it: I am sick unto death of it all—Give me to drink mandragora? Five years

have I been self-banished from this inane, most empty life ; I could no longer stand its awful vacuity ; and I come back to find it tenfold worse than before."

"Pooh—nonsense, what a rub-a-dub-dub you make about the world. What would you have ? It's well enough, and let it alone ; but you go snarling along life's highway, like a rabid cur."

"And, like him, refusing to drink at the wells of consolation and refreshment, which bubble up by the way. Is thy servant a dog that thou shouldest vouchsafe him such unsavoury similes ? wouldest thou be content to have him chased, and pelted, and execrated as a despised Pariah of the species."

"Almost does he deserve it ; 'tis fate good enough for a Timon ; a man-hater ; a reviler of his kind," said the other, again laughing ; "but now do, Wardour, permit yourself to get into good humour, condescend to 'the amiable,' and look round at the pretty women in the room, if you will not dance ; scanning sweet faces used to be a favourite amusement of yours."

"And is still ; I don't dislike women, that you know, Carston. Beauty has no more devout worshipper than I ; just tell me where to look, will you ?"

“Why, half the faces here will repay you for lifting your eyes to them. *There* is Lady Juliana Horton, who refused six-and-twenty offers before she condescended to the yoke of marriage. *There* is the Countess of Grantham; who, with her four sisters, form quite a galaxy of beauty.”

“As the newspapers have it,” added Lord John Wardour, as he raised his *lorgnette*; and turned it in one direction and another. Brief time was he before he dropped it, with an expression of despair.

“‘From Dan to Beersheba all is barren.’ Did ever mortal man regale his vision with such a congregation of insipid women, as is brought together here, to labour, and strenuously toil at pleasure? Women of no particular age, with red and white cheeks, round grey eyes: faces, broad as platters: shoulders, like pilasters: no form, no figure, no presence, or soul, with any one of them. A ghoul dropped amongst them would give refreshment to the eye. If this is the best display you can make, you may toll the passing bell for English beauty.”

“Rabid, and more rabid still, I vow,” exclaimed his companion, with a highly amused look.

"No, I'm the sane man, and you are all gone mad.

"But now, Carston, dive down for truth, and tell me, whether, as man's service for woman should be unmitigated pleasure, there is one here, you would care to dance with.—Is there one you'd feel honoured to cross the room for? But poor creatures, *they* cannot help it, of course, 'tis nature's niggardliness; but they *can* help that most intolerable style of waist, that prodigal display of bust. It wounds and offends my modesty; would that I might supply every lady with a delicate muslin shade, to veil herself from eyes of profanation! But letting this pass by, *they* feel it not, and why should I blush for them? what *can* defend the dancing? 'tis simply disgusting: extremes meet in it: rigidest formality; and horrid indecency; now moving backward and forward in a sort of funereal pantomime; anon, an indiscriminate and unblushing embracement going on. Were I an English husband,—which, please God, I'll never be—suffer my wife to enter a ball-room I would not; never should she go where any painted, perfumed popinjay might request the slight favour of clasping her round, and whirling her about."

"I presume that men are still compounded of

flesh and blood? I am I know, and could not hold a young and handsome woman—if she were to my taste—with the same indifference I could clasp a marble pillar. What is there left for lover or husband, if the chance acquaintance of an hour may be so privileged? I have lived amongst people who sedulously study outward decency and morality, and the lack of it in England utterly disgusts me. You call me a voluptuary and sensualist, in what I say and think about the sex, yet am I nothing of the kind; I honour love, such as deserves the name; and I can respect modesty, *when* I find it. I am myself pure-minded and modest; sensuous, I grant you, but far enough from sensual.”

“Credat Judæus!” was Mr. Carston’s laughing response.

“A pleasant thing it is,” continued Lord Wardour, “to recline in silken bower, or marble hall, with no sound louder than that of tinkling fount, to distract your ear; breathing fragrant air; and maybe thinking upon *her* who holds your soul in keeping. Still, and stiller do you grow; the calm of deep delight comes down, enfolds, enthrals you; languid, yet so intense, lulling and wooing your every desire to peace, as though you lay on opiate flowers: then in that dreamy state, midway ’tween earth and

heaven, let there come song and dance ; soothlier and soothlier strains from some fair daughter of music, softly stealing in upon your charmed repose. Look at her, as with hands clasped over her most graceful head—following the true Terpsichorean model—she balanceth herself as doth a bird ; and displays to you the fine glorious poetry of motion : for so it may be called, when soul, face, feet, gesture, are alike full of eloquent meaning ; and you behold Love, Hate, Jealousy most livingly depicted without a spoken word. 'Tis the perfection of high art ; and you cease to marvel at Herod the King—Carston, you have seen nothing of beauty, till you have gazed at the Caucasian women ; they are sumptuous : nature's enchantresses, stepping the earth like the born queens of it ; with eyes, whose flashing gaze tells of the proud, passionate blood coursing in their veins ; with cheeks that flush and dye with strength of rapturous emotion ; with superb forms, whose every turn and movement is a study ; beings, whose life is love ; a meteor-like career of intense, burning passion.

“With love let life end,” say they, when busiest ensnaring your soul.

“Rather alarming creatures : beautiful tigresses, are they not ? who, in one mood, murdering a lover, would, in the next, perform

suttee with his remains, as a recompense and *finale*. Is it not so, Wardour?"

"They brook no insults, I confess."

"Why did you not cage one of these imperial women, and bring her over for inspection?"

"Why? Why, because— Quick, give me the names of the party that has just entered the room."

Mr. Carston turned to look. "The first gentleman is Mr. Ferrand, of Beechwood; the lady on his arm—now *she* is an elegant woman—is Mrs. Ferrand; the others following them I cannot exactly see. Yes, now I do: the gentleman is the Hon. Wymonde Barry, one of our county members; that beautiful girl with him is Miss Somers, of Somerton, commonly spoken of as 'the loveliest lady of the county.' It is said they are engaged. See, how every eye turns upon her. Is she not a rare, beautiful creature?"

"Aye, man, *she is*, and according to the very strictest canon of beauty; a very angel clothed in the flesh. Is it a fact; or rumour merely, that they're engaged?"

"What *can* it concern you? as, please God, you'll never be an English husband," returned Mr. Carston, quizzically.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Lord John, impatiently.

"Well, I cannot tell you ; but it is so stated, and they are together everywhere, though this is almost her first public appearance. She is Mr. Ferrand's ward—an heiress—and an orphan."

"That will do ; can you introduce me ? You know them of course."

The young men crossed the room ; the ere-while listless Lord Wardour scarcely to be recognised in the animated, graceful, princely looking person standing before the Ferrand party. There were already several gentlemen conversing with both Wymonde and Charles, but Mr. Carston quietly made his way through.

"I am bringing a travelled lion to present to you, Mr. Ferrand ; this is Lord John Wardour, who has been half over the habitable globe, and come back a decidedly disagreeable and unpleasant person."

Charles smiled at the oddity of the introduction. "I enter my caveat against such an introduction as that, any way. I assure you, Mr. Ferrand, I am an unusually amiable being ; as lamb-like a lion as you could see." The chat so prefaced was not likely to be of a very formal character ; indeed it was very gay and lively.

After conversing some little time, Lord John said, "I think there is some one *here* whom I ought to know ;" and, turning round

with the most winning look and smile, extended his hand to Wymonde and said, "Am I *so changed* that I need naming to my quondam fag at Eton?"

Frank pleasure beamed over Wymonde's face, and the two shook hands most cordially. "But for your voice I should scarce have known you, Wardour. You are considerably changed; I need scarcely add, for the better."

"Ah! you flatter, like the rest. People tell me that I am really become a handsome, well-looking fellow. I much fear that my beauty must be of a very sunburnt character, from the ardent climes where I have been a sojourner. But I sought you to converse about Wymonde Barry, not about myself. I need not ask what you have been doing—the public papers have told me that you are a seeker after 'the bubble reputation.' I must say, that when I find your name mentioned in the honourable way it is, I take infinite credit to myself for the many kindly corrections I have administered to you, and flatter myself that I have done much towards developing and eliminating native talent. I trust you, on your part, are properly grateful?"

"Far from it. It *is* just possible that my liberal opinions, and horror of coercion in any

form, may date from the days of school tyranny. You were assuredly a hard task-master," said Wymonde, laughing.

"Kindly cruel, or cruelly kind; which shall we say? Do let us meet, Barry, and talk over our Eton days; I have known none happier. I came here to-night, solely with a view of meeting you, for I saw your name in the list of patrons."

Gentle and graceful courtesy distinguished his manner when Wymonde introduced him to Mabel, and he asked, if she would honour him with her hand in the dance?

A sudden thought struck Wymonde. He himself would be obliged to be absent from Mabel's side most of the evening. It was a public ball—Lilias was a most negligent *chaperon*—he would therefore place Mabel under Lord Wardour's charge—so he said—

"I am somewhat of a public character this evening. A county member, at a county ball, has no sinecure; and more devolves upon me to-night, as my colleague is not here. So, as I must play the attentive to the wives and daughters of half the people in the room, I commend Miss Somers to your especial guard and care, Lord Wardour."

"*Ich dien*—it is not possible that I can fail in *devoir* and allegiance to so fair a sovereign,"

he said, with a glance of open, but most respectful admiration.

Simply, but richly, was Mabel dressed; costly pearls were wound about her swan-like throat—they mingled with her wavy braids of glossiest hair—they spanned her round, white arms—no other ornaments did she wear; yes, one diamond bracelet sparkled and scintillated on her slender wrist. Wymonde himself had clasped it on, as he held her hand in the carriage. “Though, never was jewel half so priceless as herself,” he whispered softly the while.

Quickly did a group gather about the quadrille set, which Mabel and her partner joined: quite too much enjoyment had she in the lively music and the dance, to permit her to hear any of the whispered encomiums upon her graceful beauty, which were freely uttered by those assembled round to watch the loveliest lady of the county, as she danced. But sorely did those whisperings annoy Lord Wardour, that *any* should have the presumption to stand and coolly gaze at her—that any should dare to openly express the idle admirations which they felt. What was her glowing beauty to *them*, presumptuous fools that they were? Oh for the sanctity of the hareem, in which to shrine such a radiant creature from all save one—her lord, her governor, her owner!

"Do you waltz, Miss Somers?" he asked, as, leading her to her seat again, he gave into her hand the superb *bouquet* she had laid down.

"I do—I am very fond of waltzing," was her frank reply.

A quick shade of displeasure flitted for an instant over, but was gone from the face ere he again spoke.

"I myself have scruples about waltzing—consider it scarce seemly employment for a gentleman; but I nevertheless beg you to take me for a partner, if you *must* join in it, Miss Somers."

"I should be distressed to have you violate any scruples of conscience for me, Lord War-dour," said Mabel, smiling, though also colouring at his implied rebuke.

"Frankly, then, you decline waltzing with me?"

"I do."

"Then, I need not point out to you that *étiquette*, courtesy, give it any name you will, forbids you to waltz with any after refusing me."

"That is downright chicanery," said Mabel, laughing at the transparent artifice.

"I fear it is," said he, with a gay answering smile. "But will you pardon me point-

ing out that, as this is a public ball, you are liable to be asked to waltz by individuals you might not like. But I feel I am presuming. Will you stand up in this mazurka ? ”

But Mabel had previously determined not to dance much, and to join in neither waltz nor polka, unless with Wymonde. No request of the kind had he made ; but one or two little words he had uttered, about its being a public assembly, convinced her that her so refraining would give him pleasure ; and she had no greater joy than that, to give him pleasure—be commended of him.

So she sat quietly listening to Lord Wardour’s sparkling converse. A perfect master of the art of pleasing was he : and well he knew it. Much interested and attracted, Mabel never perceived how closely he was watching her ; that not a glance, or the slightest turn of her head to look around, escaped his notice ; that not a word or tone passed unheeded. Once or twice she caught Wymonde’s eye, and smiled : Lord Wardour’s eagle look seemed as if it would dive into her very soul, as he observed it.

But not long was Mabel allowed to sit thus quietly listening and conversing. She was besieged with requests for her hand in the dance : though, whenever she stood up, Lord

Wardour waited to receive and lead her back to her seat at its conclusion. Many were the haughty, questioning glances, directed towards him from partners who would willingly have lingered by the side of "the loveliest lady of the county."

"I have not seen you waltzing once, Mabel—how is it?" said Liliás, coming up, having at length awakened to the fact that she was shamefully neglecting her duty of *chaperon*.

"Lord Wardour was constituted my monitor for this evening, and he forbade it to me," was her smiling answer.

"Is it possible that you are so rigorous, Lord Wardour?" said Liliás, with a quizzical accent.

"I fear I've got a sad taint of eastern exclusiveness in my ideas, Mrs. Ferrand; and it has made me, perhaps, play the warden too strictly over my charge."

Here Charles joined them, and an animated conversation succeeded. It was not till after supper that Wymonde came to claim Mabel's hand.

"My *devoirs* are all paid: now for my reward," he whispered, as right gladly and lovingly he gazed into her face. Her eyes were raised to meet his glance; but yet scarcely was it with their usual heart-beaming, frank response. She had at length perceived

how keenly Lord Wardour was watching her every look and movement, and she felt embarrassed under it. Slight—almost imperceptible, was her change of manner, yet did Wymonde both see and feel it.

“ You have had quite a long evening with my old schoolmate—how do you like him, Mabel?” he asked, as he led her amongst the dancers.

“ He is *very* pleasing, dear Wymonde.”

Right through the lover’s heart darted the jealous pang, at the little emphasis she most unwittingly gave.

The Beechwood party left early: the distance they had to drive was considerable.

“ When shall I see you, Wardour?” asked Wymonde.

“ Oh, call upon me soon, I beg. This night’s meeting with you has seemed to renew my youth. I am with Carston at present, and shall be, probably, for the next week or two. I shall rejoice to recal Eton days with you.”

He accompanied them to the entrance, where they had to wait some little time ere the carriage could draw up. Mabel stood with her arm resting in Wymonde’s, the ermine cloak in which she was wrapped, only loosely folded about her.

“ Will you permit me, Miss Somers?” he

asked, with an air of the deepest deference, as he raised the cloak, and drew it more tightly round her. "I fear this keen wintry wind entertains but little regard for the young, and beautiful."

His low, yet singularly distinct tone, jarred sadly upon the lover:—aye, even such a trifle as that, had power to move him, disturb his serenity.

"I cannot stay any longer, Carston," said Lord Wardour, on his return to the ball-room.

"What," returned the other, with his peculiar light laugh; "has the fair attraction fled that kept you so resigned and quiet?"

"Even so: and I will fly too."

"But is she not a rare creature?"

"She is: earth hath no fairer daughter."

"'Tis a grievous pity she's engaged, Wardour."

"She's *not* engaged," he said, quietly but emphatically.

"Well, mind what you are about, for several have assured me so to-night. Barry's not one of your talking men, or it would be known to a certainty."

"I'm no nearer to believing it because fools prate."

"Anyhow, be careful: you're on dangerous ground."

“ You waken all Sathanus in me by such a caution : make my brain and blood tingle with deviltry. But come, let us be gone : I’m horribly fatigued with seeing these fat, robust women trying to emulate St. Vitus ; ” and he yawned drearily and contemptuously as he scanned them.

A fine, clear morning followed ; frost lay upon the ground, and sparkled in the sun-rays. Early were Mabel and Wymonde out riding ; he, if truth *must* be told, not quite as serenely and perfectly happy as he might have been, considering *who* was beside him, challenging him with downright mirth and fun, with eyes that positively laughed again, to sundry trials of speed and equestrianship. Every now and then she gave the meed of praise to Hassan,—apostrophised him as her beautiful, her noble, graceful horse, and, with her ungloved hand, caressed him ; whilst he, uttering a low, neighing sound, strove, with proud, arching neck, to reach the hand which so pleasantly stroked and patted him.

They were returning, and riding very quickly, when at a sudden bend of the road they encountered Lord Wardour, with a fine, muscular, eastern-looking servant, black as night, riding at some little distance behind him. Caracoling and chafing was the fiery

horse he sat so faultlessly, and drew up so impatiently, as they met : the creature rearing as he felt the sudden curb. Something of the Greek style of cap, with jewelled band around it, Lord Wardour wore, in lieu of hat ; and exceedingly it became his handsome, spirited face.

Gracefully he saluted Mabel.

" All hail to you, Miss Somers, and you too, Barry. I presumed so far as to make a morning call at Beechwood, in the hope of seeing you ; and truly was I disappointed to find you out. Have you any commands for the far east, Miss Somers, that I can convey ? "

" You are surely not leaving England at present ? " said Wymonde, with a look and tone of much surprise.

" I am. The wandering fit has come over me again. I shall leave this neighbourhood to-morrow. "

" How strange you are ! Where are you going ? "

" I cannot tell you. I may become a sort of masculine Lady Hester Stanhope ; and, by virtue of firman from sultan or from padishaw, take up my abode in the desert, and assume regal honours. Eastern nature suits mine ; and like a spell is the fascination of the desert. Do you know the palm-tree, Miss Somers ? "

“ Only in palm-gardens.”

“ Come into Egypt, and behold it there, under that dewless heaven and brazen sky. Never did you see aught which would impress you more than a grove of glorious palms, set round with the sere and burning desert. The sand, the palm, the silence, and the sun, make up the whole ; but you forget it, never.”

“ Think again on this matter, Wardour. With your talents, rank, and family influence, —with public life open to you, 'tis really a sin to waste your existence in this nomadic fashion.”

“ Go with me, Barry : stand in the shadow of the great dumb pyramids, and get the presumptuous thought chastised, that one life, that a cycle of lives, can do aught worthy of commemoration. All are as little children, digging holes in shifting sands : one more zealous goeth deeper than another ; but the same event—oblivion, night—cometh to them all. Where is their work—and where are they ? And echo answers—Where ?”

“ Taking your own illustration, Wardour, the happiest child will be the one who has dug deepest,—made furthest way ere he is called unto his evening rest.”

“ I am far from being sure upon that point. What say *you* to it, Miss Somers ?”

“ I should almost think that the one who has dug a little himself, and helped others to dig also, will have secured the greatest measure of happiness.”

“ Ah ! philanthropy and ambition have both their advocates, I find. But I say, that he who comes upon golden sands is joyfulest.”

“ My schoolmate has changed indeed, if he has become avaricious,” said Wymonde, with a laugh.

“ There is deep insult in the supposition. What mean you by it, Barry ? ” replied the other, in the same jesting tone ; “ but nathless must I on—on to my destiny and pursue it. The command is given me to depart from my kindred and from my father’s house. Fortuna and Automatia be propitious ! The time for hecatombs is past, else would I sacrifice. I cannot breathe in this grim and churlish clime : I pant for balmier winds.” He removed his cap as he spake,—nobler brow and face there scarce could be. “ More cerulean skies : a more ardent sun. Here all is so tame : the eye wants aliment,—hues, colours to sparkle as in paradise. Your clouds are dull and grey : your seas are muddy : like a submissive spouse they lave your feet, rather than defy you with an angry roar, rushing and sweeping.”

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"Never mind external nature," said Wymonde, earnestly, "stay with us; England needs all her worthy sons at home."

"England hath many a worthier son than I, or woe betide her future! No, I feel that I could not live, move, and possess my being 'midst this thick-ribbed conventionalism. You are too wise, too learned, and too good; excellent people, no doubt, the very salt of the earth, but I may not be 'yokefellow to custom.' Life must have more pungency about it for me; must be less prosaic—more adorned. I hate its common aspect—daily garb—its vulgarity; men jostle and elbow each other—its noises.—I am oppressed with villanous surges of sound, when I would be 'most contemplative.' One thing only could have kept me in England—one thing alone; *with that*, here I would have tabernacled, and sighed no more to roam."

"Let its influence prevail on you to stay—listen to its voice, whatever it may be, and yield yourself."

A strange smile played about his mouth, as he said—

"Nay, I must not listen. I have an unconquerable will. I go; I am no Sunday child, succeeding in all I undertake, or wish. No golden sands for me do shine—no rain-

bow spans the sky. So I go, and wander forth a homeless man—in short, a vagrant; gentlemanlike, but not the less a vagrant. You look grave, Barry; well I know that disapproving trick of yours of old, but, remember, my good fellow, I have not, like you, ‘given hostages to fortune.’ You are a green tree, I a leafless, branchless thing. No ambition have I to shine as a public man—no particular desire to be a useful one. My path lies east, sunward. I shall enact the Satrap, or the Asiarch, in some desert-fringed oasis, by Euphrates’ banks, or muddy Nilus.”

“What an intolerable taste this is of yours!” said Wymonde; “one really doesn’t know whether to laugh or revile you about it.”

“’Tis an unusual one, I grant, but it suits my Bedouin-nature—my wild and fiery blood—my true Esau-like, or Ishmael being. No alien do I feel when traversing illimitable sands; a home, ungrudgingly, they’ll give me now, and kingly burial when I die. Should you, either of you, come as pilgrims to the East, call and see the court I keep, and let me introduce you to the charmed Asian life. Did I tell you, Barry, that I read your maiden speech on the top of the great Pyramid of Ghizeh? I shall find you, perhaps, Prime Minister when I return to England, some five

or six years hence, if life is mine to do so. And you, Miss Somers, what shall I find you in that—? but the question savours of impertinence. Class me not amongst the impertinent, I beg.”

“Is it possible that you are going quite alone?” asked Mabel.

“My good Musaud,”—he pointed to his servant—“alone excepted, he is my familiar; for the last three years has been my companion by land and sea. He is a Nubian, a Mahometan, (approves of polygamy,) and faithful unto death; sleeps he never, nor slumbers, when my safety is in question. In the arid wastes, when silence becomes tyrannous—almost appalling—we have together watched moons wax and wane, the stars grow pale; together the true believer, and the baptized Christian dog! Bah—nonsense! always do I grow absurd and sentimental when I speak of Musaud. But ’tis a pleasant thing to inspire attachment, Miss Somers, in man or woman—aye, even in a hound.”

“He has a very fine head and face, Lord Wardour,” said Mabel, looking at the sable attendant, who had thrown himself from his horse, and was standing with folded arms, and eyes cast to the earth, in mute reverence.

“He hath a finer heart, Miss Somers. How

I should like you to hear him sing songs of Araby, and soft, low Nubian melodies."

"I should *very much* like to hear him," said Mabel.

"Surely a few days can make no difference to you, Wardour, or a month, or six months, even," said Wymonde.

Full of peculiar meaning was the smile which came, as he said—

"Urge me no more, Barry, I go at once. Faithful fellow as he is, I should not dare expose Musaud to the corrupting influences of civilized life, for long. Now, he is the servant of servants, the slave of slaves. Never had man one more devoted. His love passes that of woman. Could aught higher be said in an angel's praise? We will discuss Eton when we meet again, Barry, I have not time now. Farewell, Miss Somers—or, suppose we say good-bye—it hath more eloquent meaning. Were it not presumptuous, I should ask for your good wishes; for remembrance in your most saintly prayers, for a lone wanderer 'mid savage hordes. Farewell!"

He guided his horse till it stood side by side with Hassan; again removed his cap, as he extended his own, and took her ungloved hand in his, whilst his proud eagle gaze dwelled on, and registered her every feature, as though

to fold it in a deathless coil about his memory. With quick eager fervour did his lips bend to the hand, and leave kisses there.

Exulting—almost defiant triumph was in his prolonged gaze upon her downcast eyes, and on her flushed cheek, which had so suddenly grown crimson.

“Crumbs from the rich man’s table are the beggar’s right,” he said, as he released her hand. “Good-bye, Barry—*my friend*; the best saints in heaven look after you both.”

He gave his fiery horse the rein, and was gone, ere either of them had recovered from their deep surprise. Quickly they rode home; not a word was spoken by either till they reached Beechwood.

“Go to your drawing-room, and I will join you there,” said Wymonde, as he assisted Mabel to dismount. Startling was his voice, from its low husky tone; one timid look upon his face told her what was coming.

She met him as he entered; (pale was he with suppressed passion—his eye blazing with it;) she would fain have put her hand into his, but he drew back and haughtily scanned it.

“Has it been cleansed — purified?” he asked, his lip catching with overpowering agitation, spite of the haughty look.

"It had not," she meekly faltered; "should she go?"

He did not answer, but led her to the door.

Most troubled and appealing was her glance to him as she re-entered; but he heeded, saw it not; by an imperious gesture he commanded her to sit; whilst he himself stood before her. But not yet could he speak; clenched was his hand, throbbing his heart and brain, as with tumultuous steps he turned from her and paced the room.

But the vehement passion found words at length, and what a storm broke over her.

The frightened deer flieth to covert; the timid bird to the shelter of the leafy brake, when tempest draweth nigh; but where could she flee to, from him—from him, and from the torturing reproaches of that cruel, and most causeless jealousy, which was goading him, till he, the usually calm, dignified, and self-controlled, scarce knew what he said or did.

Pale, shrinking, utterly appalled she sat, offering no word of defence or vindication,—wholly borne down by the strength of that unreasoning anger poured out upon her. Meek, low, wooing entreaty, that he would sit beside her,—that he would not bend upon her so stern and pitiless a look, broke from her lips at last.

His anger was not gone; his agitation scarce abated; but he could not—being man—deny to sit beside her, or refuse to take that little hand, which seemed as though it knew not where to go, did he play the churl, and cast it from him?

With a sigh, a tremor, almost a quiver of her whole frame, she bade him go on,—and he did go on, though it was with softening voice, and eye, fast losing its sternness, in tenderness, as he felt her gentle pressure,—heard her low-breathed sighs. An exclamation of pain suddenly escaped her—he had grasped her hand, unwittingly, with so much strength, that the rings she wore seemed entering the tender flesh. Passionately did he kiss the crimsoned fingers, with hurried words of mingled fondness and keenest self-reproach.

“*This pain* is nothing; soon will it pass, beloved,” she said, as having taken off her rings, she gave him back her hand, and looked in his face with a faint, heart-sick look, to which tears would bring glad relief; and she drew his arm round her, and leaned her head back upon his breast—“her resting-place”—she always called it.

“Do not misinterpret my silence,—do not expect me to justify myself or reason with you *now*. I am too sad in mind; besides, you

are too angry to listen to me—scarce just. Wymonde, may I weep? will it annoy or offend you, if I do? I feel so very—very sorrowful,—tears would relieve me.”

So she hid her face upon his breast, and there she sobbed and wept till that inward pain was better; the sad heart-ache lightened; medicined with sighs full of patience, in which lay no reproach.—

The tyrant mood was gone; behold him lying at her feet in an agony of shame. Fast as the hot, angry words had poured, now poured the penitent ones, beseeching pardon with most remorseful entreaty,—asking, entreating forgiveness, of his headlong, baseless anger. He had been half madden’d, crazed with jealousy, he said.—Dropping are her tears o’er his face and hands, even whilst he pleads—his thoughts had been disturbed, even before Lord Wardour’s shameful insult came. “Call it idle daring and bravado, Wymonde,” she murmured; “had he loved her less, he had not inflicted that cruel injustice on her; made her shed such bitter tears; sigh so sadly: but his peace was wholly in her hands,—he lay completely at her mercy, for with her rested the *all*, this life held for him.”

“But abase himself thus lowly, he must

not," she said; "she would not suffer it, for he had had much to vex him: guiltless though she was herself, in thought, or word, or deed, of aught which could disquiet him. And she most meekly prayed him to never again"—back came the quiver, tremor, sigh—"never once again allow his thoughts of her, who was to be his wife, to get tinctured with suspicion, or doubt, or fear; but to let her love him in her very heart of hearts, always."

And he swore a lover's oath, that misdoubt her again he never—never would!—nay, 'twere impossible!

"Look up my gentle, peaceful dove, and let me see myself mirrored in your eyes!—read my forgiveness there!"

The soft, clear, violet rays beamed full upon him, and a smile, beautiful in its half sadness as sunlight through quivering leaves, broke forth; gently she whispered—"But what, if you could see yourself mirrored in my heart?"

"I can, Mabel, my most generous love; the eyes are the windows of the soul. Look up again."

Lord Wardour had, on calling at Beechwood, requested to see Mr. Ferrand, and was accordingly shown into the library. The particulars of the interview Charles communicated to Wymonde, as they sat after dinner.

"But a remark or two had passed between us, when he said he should be obliged by a direct answer to a direct question. 'Was there any existing engagement between his friend Barry and Miss Somers?'

" 'Most undoubtedly there is, Lord War-dour; one regularly understood and sanctioned,' I said. I don't think, by the way, I should much like to offend that man; never in my life did I undergo a bolder, a more searching scrutiny, than that he then fixed on me.

" 'Then how was it that Barry gave her in charge *to me* last night,—coolly, as her brother might have done? He scarce approached or looked at her. I watched them both, and saw no significant indications of lovers' exclusive preference, or I should not have been here this morning. Am I to understand that he possesses Miss Somers's affections? or has "unspiritual circumstance" drawn them together?'

" 'We all believe her very strongly attached to him.'

" 'She is an orphan, I am told, without any near relative to guard her. Has there been no undue influence exercised *for* him? Has he won her fairly?'

" 'He has. He has made his way with her, proposed, and been accepted.'

“ ‘ Thanks should he offer to the gods, then ; aye, and oblations. Were it any other than he, I would enter the lists with him, and let the lady stand umpire. As *my* wife, Miss Somers would step forth a Countess of one of the oldest and proudest families in England, though its coronet could never grace a fairer brow, I am bound to say.—I look at things with very human eyes, and I know that *these* considerations have their weight with women.’

“ ‘ I understand you, Lord Wardour ; but you would scarcely like to owe a preference to such an adventitious claim as *that*.’

“ ‘ I should have no fear. Women are facile creatures ; use them well, and they are sure to love their keepers. I could mould any heart to me.’

“ ‘ Maybe so. But this argument of yours, specious as it might be with many, would have no weight in the present instance.’

“ ‘ Pardon my hinting, that it is possible you *may* be mistaken. I know as much of feminine nature as most.’

“ ‘ You might ruffle the course of Miss Somers’s engagement, but divert it you could not. She would refuse you.’

“ ‘ Never saw I man look so intensely haughty, as he said, ‘ He was but little accustomed to receive a negative when he asked

for aught women had to bestow. But it is idle to talk in this way. Had you not assured me that she most deliberately cares for him, I would have made the effort to undermine him. Love laughs at treacheries, you know. Barry is strangely secure with his prize—he commended her to *my special charge*. In the land where I have lived so long, they commit their women to the special charge of men without passions, and it seems to me a wise and proper arrangement. I do not profess to be without them. Mine are tolerably ardent pulses.’

“ ‘ Your long absence from England makes you forget how thoroughly Englishmen trust their female connexions in all the amenities of social intercourse. You were Barry’s friend, Lord Wardour ; that fact alone, he would consider, guaranteed fair and faithful dealing on your part.’

“ ‘ I would trust my friend with my purse, my name ; nay might, perhaps, encounter some degree of risk to life for him—but trust him with the woman I loved, I would not : whether she were wife or mistress. Though, perhaps, mine are the grafted ideas of one accustomed to think of women as dwellers in the silken seclusion of the harem, and coming abroad, veiled from head to foot. The English

system, perhaps, is better, to let Love and Trust grow up together; though, mark me, I do not think Trust indigenous to the soil. Did Miss Somers, and her matchless beauty, belong to me, I should shut her up. I suppose you think *that* would not be likely to add to her happiness,' he added, as he caught sight of the smile I could not keep back.

" ' Scarcely; I do not know any one who would sooner rebel at any restrictions upon their liberty.'

" ' Well, it is Barry's business, not mine: and I suppose I must glamour myself into the belief, that the die is better cast as it is; he's a fine, honourable, steadfast fellow. One of the class from which the pillars of society are hewn; he will study her, and make her happier than one of my wayward nature could have done.—

" ' But I am not one to stand looking into the Paradise, from whose joys I am shut out; so I will bring this social-ethical discussion to a conclusion. Will you commend me, *very much*, to my friend, Mr. Ferrand, and tell him all—yes, all I have said? Add to it, that he has won the fairest, rarest flower, man's eye hath ever gazed on, east or west. That I, not having it, covet it; would rob him, and lay it in my own bosom, if I could. 'Tis

quite as well, perhaps, we do *not* meet. I might, in my present mood, be tempted to anger him. Is he ever jealous—this friend of mine, Mr. Ferrand?’

“ ‘ I think not ; at least, it does not come under my observation, if he is.’

“ ‘ Ah ! he does not love her half enough, then. Were I in his happy place, I should be suspicious of the winds and beams of Heaven.’

“ So ended our conversation. Vastly indebted are you *to me* ; one word of encouragement from me, and you would have had such a rival as any man might dread.—Well, never did I see a face look more annoyed and decomposed, than yours does at this moment, Barry. For any sake, go to the drawing-room, and let Mabel soothe you into peace and amiability again. I fear I erred in saying you were never jealous,” said Charles, with a wonderfully amused air.

CHAPTER XI.

" 'Twas in the pleasant spring-time,
When the birds began to build,
And the heart of all creation
With a vast delight was fill'd."

Ballad of Richard Birnall.

THE alder's tassel, and the larch's cone, were early seen that spring. March grew gentle, and dispensed sweet balmy winds, and glorious sunshine. And April, "proud pied" April, came bounding in with airy footsteps, with smiles instead of tears, and bade the flowers burst forth, and deck the earth.

It was during the Easter recess, which of course Wymonde spent with his ladye-love, that they drove together to Somerton. It was the first flower show of the season.

"Blow, blow, ye southern winds," exclaimed Mabel, and thrust her lace bonnet back, that the breezes might have freer play on her soft mantling cheek. "I could not, I am sure of it, dear Wymonde, live with people whose blood did not quicken when the spring came."

"'Tis a glorious season, Mab; but no spring has ever come, and none will ever come like unto the next, to *me*."

The marked significance of his tone attracted her attention, and she gave him an earnest look, which, however, changed speedily into a laugh.

“ ‘ Evermore harping on my daughter.’ ”

“ Nay, ’tis my wife—my wife, you mean.”

“ Always are you clanking my fetters in mine ears.—*Merci ! merci !* my lover ! I pray thee do not chide !”

“ Clanking fetters ? ” repeated Wymonde, in questioning tone.

“ Forgive—forgive me ! do *not* punish ! Music is in them ; changed are they, on the instant, into joy-bells ! Jestings was I with my *souverain !* He has forgiven me, or will immediately do so, when he recalls how my poor heart reflects his smiles and frowns ! There ! now he is kind—now he is gracious ! and I am happy again once more ! ”

Laughing gaily, she proceeded with the subject on which she had been speaking : how she meant to enjoy so much the present spring and the coming summer—to be out of doors early and late, imbibing their delights ; how her little house-fairies had promised to be out with her, and increase its pleasantness by their merry company ; how they had decided to spend many gaysome, gambolling days in the forest, and to go everywhere together.

"The darlings quite understand that this will be my last summer with them. Ethelle says, 'I shall not be *their* Mabel next spring.'"

"I fear your parting with these little ones will be a direful business, Mabel!"

"Nay, I know not how I am to get through it. You must not grudge me a few tears *when* the Farewell comes, dear Wymonde."

A little pause, and the snowy cambric was pressed to the sweet eyes; but not for long was it so held, for the lover needed the hand, and must, would have it in his own; and soon the eyes shone out again.

"Do listen to that lark—is it not sweet? See, there he is, almost close at Heaven's gate! What a sprightly song he has! And do look at the fine storm-tints about those rocky, piled-up clouds, set in the deep rich blue! Do you think it will thunder?—how sultry it is!—just the day to make you covet Bulegh Court (our beautiful Bulegh), delectable it would be to lie in the shade, and listen to the sound of the cool, rushing water, and the whispering leaves!"

And she promised him to go to Bulegh, and see all the improvements that had been effected, ere she went to Athalah's marriage, which was to take place in three weeks' time.

"It looked now one of the loveliest places in England," said Wymonde.

"Had he remembered the stone slippers over the door of her boudoir?" she asked demurely.

But now enlivening strains of music reached their ears, and they drove on more quickly to the Flower-Show.

Eminently successful had been the attempt to awaken a taste for flower, and vegetable culture amongst Mabel's people. It was not done all at once: trouble was required—considerable patience called for. But for this she and Philip Abney had prepared themselves, and were not discouraged. *Now*, the spirit of competition was fully awakened; early and late were the villagers to be found in their gardens—and, start not, gentle reader, when I add, greenhouses; for many a small greenhouse had sprung up in a lowly cottage garden.

Never came a request before Mabel for greater accommodation, space, more abundant light, or air, that was not cheerfully complied with. But over the uprearing of the greenhouses she gave no help at all, rightly concluding, that a luxury like that, which involved self-denial, working, striving in an added degree, would be more prized by her people, than one obtained easily.

Though the commencement of a greenhouse always ensured a speedy call from Mabel ; with her most sunshiny smiles would she speak of it, and express her great satisfaction at what was being done. Certain was the greenhouse to rise very fast after such pleasant stimulation.

Seeds, cuttings, grafts, were always to be obtained from the Hall-gardens for the asking. And it was an understood fact, that the more of these were asked for, the better pleased Miss Somers was.

On the lawn in front of the Hall were the Flower-Shows held ; there, screened by tasteful awnings from sun, and wind, and shower, were the bright blooms displayed. Never had the scene worn a gayer aspect than on the day of this Spring Flower-Show. The sun shone brightly down upon groups of busy, well-dressed people thronging about, the bells rang out merrily, and the band of wind instruments played with beautiful effect, stationed at some little distance, and hidden by a magnificent group of trees.

Always did Miss Somers expect to see her people there—the schools, of course, her tenants with their families, the labourers—a half-holiday was it made, on purpose that the latter class might not be absent—with wife and children, decked in holiday attire.

But not alone the Somerton people. A very popular person in the neighbourhood was Mabel. Those sunny, gracious smiles of hers warmed all hearts to her; and visitors from wide-spread points, came to the Flower-Shows; for pleasant was it to witness the gathering of the different classes—the mingling of rich and poor, with neither holding aloof on the one side, nor presumptuous stepping forward on the other.

Many came to observe how Miss Somers's plans were carried out and answered; for much curiosity was aroused by her new modes of procedure.

"Aye, she was very young and very enthusiastic," said the majority, with oracular head-shakings, and prophecies that nought but evil could come of so much educating and refining.

"She actually had drawing, and music classes in her Charity Schools. It would never do—it would never do, to put working people on a level with their betters, in that way—so that the toiler for his daily bread might have as well-informed a mind as the hereditary squire. The very foundations of society would be shaken and uprooted, if such things were to be realized. It never answered to stir up the mud: it only offended everybody by its noxious, poisonous gases; far better was it to

let it settle down upon its lees—and so Miss Somers would find by-and-by—she would have more than enough of these experiments of hers before she had done.”

“Wait and see,” said Mabel to it all; “just wait ten years, and see if I have not the best-conducted set of people anywhere to be found. I mean to do something notable every year: this year I shall build some model cottages. My tenants tell me that more labourers are needed on their farms; but that there are no houses for them. So I am going to build some of the prettiest and most commodious ones, that are to be found in all the country side. Ugly houses offend me very much—and I invite *you*, Sir Humphrey, to come and inspect them, and copy them if you will.”

These observations were addressed to Sir Humphrey Otway, a rich, childless old knight, whose property in part abutted upon hers, and with whom (though he moaned and wailed over her strange methods of going on, and often good-humouredly scolded her), she was a great favourite. Openly avowed was his intention of making her his heiress.

“Well, I’ve no objection to come and look at these little palaces of yours that are to be: but now just tell me that what I heard this morning *isn’t true* — that you are going to

have a Botanical Class in your school—an actual Botanical Class !”

“It’s quite true—quite true. And I shall be most happy to enrol your name the very first on the list. Don’t look so shocked ! I do, in my simplicity, believe that it is better to guide the stream, which we cannot repress. *You cannot repress it, Sir Humphrey.*”

“Ah ! well, young lady,” he said, with a jovial smile coming back, “I’ve little doubt but you will have found out your error long before ten years are over. It’s all very well, so long as—

‘Queen Anne, Queen Anne, you sit in the sun,
As fair as a lily, as white as a swan :’

but there is such a thing as burning your fingers. Yes, even such dainty ones as yours get scorched, sometimes.”

“Wait and see,” said Mabel, gaily, “take nothing upon trust ; just be patient for a little, and you shall behold for yourself, what readers, thinkers, and above all, *first-class workers*, I shall draft off into the great world, from this little corner of it : such sensible, striving, rising young people as you will not readily find elsewhere. *I do wish*, Sir Humphrey, you would join heart and hand with me ?”

“You never spoke more gracious words,

never. Most happy, and most honoured shall I be to join heart and hand at once ; and make you Lady Otway without delay."

Merrily pealed out the old knight's laugh, as he vowed he would tell the Hon. Wymonde Barry of Miss Somers's most generous proposal to himself. Mabel gaily entering into the jest, made him a profound curtsy, and mirthfully declared she had a better opinion of his discretion.

But all this time, the people at the Flower Show are eagerly waiting ; and soon, the door of the entrance Hall is thrown open, and, followed by a goodly train of friends, she of the gladdening presence, and the radiant brow steps forth. Hats are raised on every side, for almost reverent was the homage paid to Mabel on her own domain. In tasteful morning toilette was she ; dress and mantle of airiest muslin floating round her, fastened with lilac ribbons from throat to hem ; her white transparent bonnet was wreathed round with sprays of lilac ; and the same soft, delicate hue, pervaded parasol and gloves.

None needed to study dress so little, none became it more ; you saw only the *tout ensemble*, the graceful, elegant mien, the rich, happy beauty : ever fuller and happier when her lover was, as now, beside her.

"To see Miss Somers looking her very best and brightest," said Sir Humphrey, "she must have that lucky fellow, Barry, by her side; *then*, he did not think her equal in beauty was to be found. Were he, himself, only forty years younger, he would certainly have either begged, or stolen her: and sent Mr. Barry to the right-about quickly."

Soon are her Somerton friends clustered round her; and when she again moves on, she is linked, not only with Wymonde, but with Mr. Geary; and chat-chatting with him and Philip, who walks beside them, whilst every now and then she throws a quizzical glance towards the Doctor, who is promenading with Madame.

Presently, in the midst of her surveying and commending the beautiful flowers, and magnificent vegetables, she whispers Wymonde,

"That she believes the music will *make* her dance; she feels as if she could spin round like a dancing dervish. Does he think there would be any breach of decorum in having a waltz on the grass after the Show is over?"

With a smile, Wymonde said, "he thought it would not do."

"Well, just a stately Polonnaise, then—Ah! do look at those beautiful potatoes—what about the Polonnaise?"

"No, no—not even a Polonnaise."

"Yet would it be Watteau-like, and pretty. May I not?"

"You may not—may not, child."

"Ah, well-a-day! how thrall'd I am," she said, with a laughing look of discontent. "Did you ever see such splendid rhubarb?—it's magnificent. Whose basket of rhubarb is this?"

"It's mine, if it please you, Miss Somers," said a clean, hearty, wholesome-looking labourer; coming forward to answer the question with an air of infinite pride.

"It *does* please me very much, Marratt, to see you all taking such pains with your gardens," she said with her most gracious smile.

A lowly obeisance, and a very red face, testified to the great satisfaction her commendation had given.

In a little while, she is occupying a raised seat of honour under a sort of flowery canopy, in the centre of a horse-shoe circle: at her feet, sits that stately little fellow, Frank Somers Ferrand, in all the bravery of feathers and velvet, and bold, bright looks; on one side of her stand her congregated friends; on the other, the judges and awarders of the prizes, which she, with her own fair hands, is to distribute; in front, are forms filled with a glittering bevy of ladies, and accompanying troops of children, who cannot, by dint of

either persuasion or dissuasion, be kept in place; indeed, Mabel herself, by sundry incantations of look and smile, induces some half-dozen of them to break into the circle, sacred to the prize-winners, and come tumbling towards her.

"She's a law-breaker as well as a law-maker," says Sir Humphrey, who keeps a curious eye upon her various manœuvres with the restless imps. Considerably astonished was he on being called upon to receive a card of honour, for the best show of cinerarias, of which he was ticketed the exhibitor: he vowed he knew nothing about them—he could not, in fact, distinguish between a cineraria and a Michaelmas daisy—they *might* be his property, but he had given no orders respecting them being brought *there*;" and here he abruptly stopped as he heard the name of "John Potter" called out; and beheld, sheepishly stalking into the circle, John Potter, of Thurland—his own place and property—to receive a prize for first-class ranunculuses. John Potter, indeed! his own serf, slave—a common day-labourer, not worth twenty pounds in the world.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, with something between a groan and a whistle, "that's it, is it? Like master, like man; well, we *shall* come to something by-and-by. I must say I'm astonished, Mrs. Ferrand," he said, turning to

Lilias, who, looking very gay and very sparkling, stood near ; “ *very much astonished* to find some of my own fellows showing flowers ; when I did not know they cared a rush for them—how is it ? ”

“ A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” said Lilias, oracularly, and maliciously, too.

“ Ahem ! Well I suppose—”

“ Is it not a delightful scene, Sir Humphrey ? ” asked Mabel, accosting him with a look of triumphant happiness.

“ Very charming, *very, indeed,*” he said, with a comical air and tone, “ but there’s a snake amongst your flowers, my princess.”

“ Where—where ? ” she cried, with a start, and nervous grasp of Wymonde’s arm.

Sir Humphrey almost laughed himself into apoplexy.

“ To see the way she caught hold of Mr. Barry, was the richest thing he ever beheld in his life,” he said.

But he nevertheless scolded her all the way back to Beechwood, till Mabel laughingly declared that he had broken the drum of her ears. “ Somerton was a hot-bed of rank Radicalism, which would heat all the neighbourhood,” he said. “ Did *she* think that a horse would submit to draw, and to carry, and to be beaten and kicked, and sworn at, if he

knew his own strength? Well, *she* was teaching the horse, he could tell her."

The upshot of the matter was, that before the evening closed, Sir Humphrey had agreed to have Flower and Fruit-Shows at Thurland; his young heiress was to arrange everything for him; take all trouble off his hands—distribute prizes and everything. With clapping hands and dancing feet, did Mabel agree to it all; in the exuberance of her spirits, she threatened to make Sir Humphrey waltz.

"No—no," laughed out the knight, "he was ready to kiss the hem of her garment, or the shadow of her shoe-tie; but waltz he would not:" and he claimed Mr. Barry's august protection, against Miss Somers's advances.

In a few days Wymonde returned to town: daily did the lovers correspond; for love must have sustenance; "'twas famished if it got not daily food," he said; "'twas a fire that ever needed plenishing," said she: so being of one mind, they plenished it, and fed it.

"—— Remember you the night before you left, O lover mine:" she wrote, "when we together stood under a sweet, blossoming tree, and the evening sun shone down; and we watched it set, and the moon rise up: and we talked of watching sun, and moon, and star, and lake of dream-like beauty, in that soft Aonian place

of olive and of vine, where we shall go, when we, in thought and word, in love, and life, are linked to each other.

“I have to-night stood under the same tree with Philip—stood looking at the summer snow, the heaped, pure, pale flowers that lie beneath, and watched them still falling slow, and as it were reluctantly; and we grew pensive, and likened it to the young, fair blossoms, drooping and falling from life’s stem, in its early spring; and Philip spoke less seriously than tenderly, of evermore looking towards the Father’s kingdom, and of the happy dead who had reached it; till someway—I could not help it—tears surprised me.

“There is something heavenly about Philip’s mind; such a depth of serenity and peace—free from all taint of earthly pride and passion, his thoughts rise up from a storm-tossed world, and rest in God’s calm presence. Something more than woman must, Philip’s wife be,—she should have absolute saintliness about her.

“I have had such gossiping, pleasant letters from Athalah, and dear Mamma.—Gaily does the latter bid me be very chary of my beauty, and care for it most tenderly; that so, I may go to the marriage-festival wearing my finest bloom. For why do you think this is? Lest Annie,

wild Annie Leyden, should surpass me. She has excited quite a *furor* of admiration in Rome, amongst poets, painters, sculptors, everybody, in fact. Mamma says that Constance's, and Patricia's receptions have been most crowded whenever there was expectation of her presence. Every one asks, 'Have you seen the magnificent beauty?' and that Annie receives all this homage with a sort of superb disdain, not even condescending to amuse herself with it.

"I shall be quite eager to see her again. Mamma is daily expecting the arrival of the whole party.

"I have also heard to-day from Margaret Fisher: very gratefully she speaks of the continued kindness she has received from both Constance and Patricia, and also from Annie Leyden. She describes her beauty as something wonderful: says, 'she is followed everywhere; surrounded whenever she appears in public. Yet very often does she steal from it all, to come and sit beside her easel; and talk about England.'

"We have had such a trying on of bridal vestments, which arrived from town yesterday. Rich and rare they are, though I will not bewilder you with a description. 'Vastly elegant and becoming,' says Charles; who is, you know, the most hypercritical being in the

world, over ladies' apparelling. I can vouch for the children; less of earth-born than angel creatures do they look, in their embroidered muslins, and beautiful piquant hats; *that* baby is surpassing, (many ladies' hearts he'll break, I fear, when he comes to be a man) I scarce know how, but Lilius and I insensibly slid into chat upon silks and satins, upon lace *Alençon*, and *guipure*; upon lilies, myrtle-wreaths, and orange blooms, and other things all-suitable for brides and bridal—when lo! in midst, I suddenly bethought myself, that I had vowed a vow to keep unto myself, this one last year, for girlish merriment and freedom, for going hither and thither at my own free will, for weaving flower garlands, all unheeding of the fact that next year the marriage garland will encompass me,—the wifely crown. So away—away with thought or word of wedding dress; it belongeth to next year.

“ I see in this morning's papers, the announcement of Laura Dysart's marriage with Sir Frederick Clavell. Were I not so happy—so very happy (joy within, and joy without, is mine,) I should almost make a trouble of the estrangement existing between myself and them. Deepest resentment they evidently entertain towards me; my letters unanswered, my very existence unacknowledged. Gladly would I do anything that could remove my

uncle's stern displeasure, but know not how to set about it.

"We, that is, all the feminines, are going to the deep, cool shades of the Forest to-morrow, to spend an *al fresco* day. We shall eat luncheon under the trees, and list to the anthemizing Zephyrs, if so be they come abroad; or, if not, lie on the mossy turf, and indolently hearken to some tinkling stream or other making pleasant music. To me, will it bring vividly to remembrance a sweet and antique place midst swelling hills, and solemn woods; where sound of fresh, gay, water springs, merrily flashing and leaping, is never lost.

"*There* have I been with you; there do I again with you go, ere the year is a week older, and behold it in all the tender glory of May.

"I saw the name for which I was looking in the debates this morning; and seeing it, I kissed it. Yes, I kissed it once, twice;—nay, I am not sure whether it was not thrice; but this being a profound secret, not even the birds of the air are to hear whisper of such confession, lest they should tell the matter.

"The summer lightning is playing so behind the clouds to-night, and every little while coming dazzling out, like a marvellous unveiled sun. It compels me to look at it though against my will; for I am so timorous at lightning;—yet ~~you~~ enjoy a thunder-storm, how is it?

“Few are the days which intervene between, and that golden day of the calendar, which gives me back my lover; his smile, his words, the touch of his hand, its pressure, which thrills me, my heart bounds under it.

“Nigh to losing my simple wits am I, sometimes in metaphysical pondering upon love,—and what it is! Why it is, that I hold myself accountable to you for word, deed, aye, even thought. How it is, that you can sadden me with a look, or make me glad by a mere slight glance of the eye! My very name has a different sound when uttered by your lips, and when you call me ‘your fair and pleasant love,’ as you so often do; I hear it not alone with outward, but it is drank in by my inward spiritual ear. Yes, it falls like soft music tones.

“Even when I sleep my heart waketh to you. The world is fairer when I see it with you beside me: it runs over with love, and song, and poetry. I know not how it is; I cannot understand this knitting of my soul to yours.—But so it is.

“Farewell, dear—dear Wymonde. I pray and beseech you always to believe that your seal is set upon my heart, that you are dearer than life to

“MABEL SOMERS.”

CHAPTER XII.

"Under the greenwood tree."

"THERE is not the slightest chance of rain, I think," said Charles, as he assisted them into the carriages, on their starting to the forest; "but don't wander too far, and don't be later than six o'clock. These verdant amusements are apt to make people forgetful of time."

"The carriages are to come at five: I have not a doubt we shall be home before you," said Lili^as.

"I shall certainly not get back before seven," said Charles, who had an appointment in the county town. "Now, Mrs. Abney, I solemnly commit the charge of the whole party to you,—*you* are to be trusted."

Great was the display of parasols as they drove off, for the air was sultry, the sun intensely hot. The portion of the forest they were now bent on exploring, was far away from that to which they had made the nutting expedition; and on reaching its border, they alighted from the carriages, which returned home, one

servant alone remaining with them. Most delightful was the twilight shade into which they plunged, after the dusty road and glaring sun. Lilius grew enthusiastic, and said,

“It was positively worth the trouble of coming, which was much for an indolent person like herself to say.”

Far into the wood did they stroll, resting occasionally on the enamelled turf, then on through the pleasant forest-alleys once again; running heedlessly about were the children, with flushed faces, and disordered hair, complaining of the excessive heat, and fanning themselves vigorously with their broad-brimmed hats, anon, starting off in frantic chase of bird or butterfly.

It was an hour past noon when they reached a spot where the ground sloped on every side into a soft green hollow,—most cool and inviting did it look,—so here they agreed to bivouac, eat their sandwiches, and rest themselves in quiet *abandon*,—far too sultry was it, to think of going further. So bonnets were slung upon trees, and books reached out, and shawls spread upon the ground for them to recline on. Very solitary was the place,—the young hares and rabbits were scampering in and out of the tall fern and gorse,—the woodpecker was tap-tapping the tree stems, the

voice of the turtle, was intermingled with the liquid call of the cuckoo, and the cry of the lapwing.

"I wish we had ordered the carriages for six instead of five," said Lillas, lazily looking up from her book, to glance at Mabel and Miss Lancaster wreathing long tendrils of blue periwinkle round the children's hats, "it will just be getting pleasant when we are leaving."

"We may keep them waiting a little without any great sin, I suppose?" replied the busy Mabel.

"Yes," drawled out Lillas, "how pretty that is!"

"That was not thunder, surely?" said Mrs. Abney, as a dull rumbling sound reached the ear.

All listened, but the sound had died away, and Lillas said, "It was no doubt, a blast from the stone quarry."

Most unclouded blue looked what little they could see of the sky, but there was such pleasant, soft, gloom that any slight darkening over, would be scarce perceptible. So, no alarm was felt. The children were busily occupied laving hands and faces, accompanied with merry sprinklings of each other, at a sparkling spring they had found bubbling up at some little distance, when there came again the same

rumbling sound which had come before, but now much louder—undoubtedly was it thunder.

One and all started up from under the trees where they were scattered, “On with your hats instantly, children,” cried Lillas in a panic voice; “what *are* we to do?”

She might well put the question, for save a woodman’s cottage, a mile further in the forest, there were no houses, whatever, and it lacked yet full two hours of the time appointed for the carriages.

“What are we to do?” again asked Lillas, as thunder pealed once more, and they looked at each other in blank dismay.

“Let us make for the nearest shelter,” said Mrs. Abney, “it is so dangerous under these trees.”

So off they set to walk to the cottage as quickly as they could, with their steps hindered by the children, who had suddenly grown helpless with fear, as the thunder rolled over their heads.—There could be little doubt that a formidable storm was hurrying on, the dallying breeze of the morning had given place to dead stillness; not a leaf moved in the windless air, nor was a bird-note, now to be heard. Deeper than forest gloom fell, for the forked lightning to flash and riot in.

The trees were gradually thinning, and they

could now see the sky, where shafts of coppery sunlight were streaming through rifts of densest clouds piled on each other, stratum above stratum,—from their dark bosom darted the lightning, incessantly.

Not a drop of rain had yet fallen ; and now a low, moaning wind rose up, eddying and circling the moss and leaves, grimly dancing them round and round, then passing on to perform the same gyration elsewhere : hollow and miserable was its sound, as though it bare along the despairing cry of lost spirits.

“ God have mercy,” cried Lillas, in a half-choking voice, as a flash of blinding fire bathed them round, and the instantaneous thunder crashed and pealed over their defenceless heads, “ O children—children, if you were but safe at home.”

Another flash and thunder roar, and all at once it ceased.—The spirit of tempest for an instant folded his wings, in rest. But not for long, the tree tops began to bend and bow, he had leaped amongst them, and laughed in wild mockery, as he shred their leaves in showers, and snapped their branches, as a child snaps twigs.

It was impossible to advance, they could scarce keep their footing against the stormy wind. At this instant a labouring man

crossed from a side path, and Liliás, whose terror was extreme, asked him if shelter was near.

"Very near," he said, "his own cottage was close at hand and at their service." In a few more minutes, he threw open a cottage door, and bid them enter.

"Thank God," came from every lip, as they found themselves under cover of a roof. Not a minute too soon had they reached it, for sharp sounds upon broad leaves told that the rain was coming. The man's wife was cowering in a corner of the room, surrounded by three or four children,—she rose up with a pale, terrified look to find chairs for the party.

"I came home because I thought you'd be so frightened, Martha," said the man, looking good-naturedly at her; "my missis has always been so timorsome at thunder, ever since two men were killed not a hundred yards from our door; they were sheltering under a tree, and the lightning struck it."

"Sufficient to make any one timorous, I think," said Liliás in a low voice.

"Yes, ma'am, it was; Martha's never altogether overgot it. I found them after the storm was over, stone dead—stone dead. She helped me to carry them in, and we laid them

across that table. There was very little to be seen; their clothes were scorched, that was all. They must have died very easy, they looked so quiet: fine hearty young men they were, as need be seen. Dear me, what a dreadful bad storm it is."

It did indeed rage in magnificent power. The rain fell in sheets of water; the thunder crashed in one continuous roar; till not only windows and walls, but the very earth seemed rocking with the concussion; and the awful darkness was made more intolerable by the incessant glare of lightning. At length came a fiery blaze, that leaped into the windows, as if to scorch all it came nigh. The children shrieked, for what a roar of thunder came with it; and they clung about the others in abject fear. Mabel's face was bowed down to the little terrified Maud's.

"*That* has done mischief, I feel sure," said the Woodman.

Suddenly breaking the profound stillness which succeeded, was heard the loud cry of a child; some little creature out in the storm was wailing with fear and dread. Another blaze, another roar; and, breaking the stillness, again the wailing cry.

The man had listened intently; he moved a step or two, looked at his wife—hesitated—moved again.

“ Stop where you are, John ; you shall not go,” she cried, catching his arm, her eyes staring with affright.

“ I think I ought ; it might be one of our own, you know.”

“ *You shall not go*, John ; remember the dead men that lay in this house last summer. Oh, don’t go—don’t go,” she gasped forth in an extremity of fear, with her arms clinging about him to detain him.

She was yet uttering her piteous entreaty, when a light figure, whose footfall fell soft as a snow-flake, glided across the floor, quietly opened the door, and stepped out into the darkness and the rushing rain. Uncertain where to go, she stopped for an instant till the wail rose again, and guided her to a wide-spreading oak ; under its broad umbrage stood a poor little boy with ragged clothing ; he was drenched to the skin, and white with terror.

“ Come with me, poor boy ; poor child,” she said, and taking his hand, led him to the cottage.

The man came to meet her, looking ready to sink to the earth with shame ; but there was no time for words, the lightning was wrapping them round in anger at being defrauded of its prey.

"Oh heavens, Mabel, what madness!" exclaimed Mrs. Honey, in downright anger, as she looked at her wet clothing, and thought of the consequences if she must run.

The woman took the poor forlorn child up, and gave him some dry garments; but she knew nothing that she could lend to Mabel and Alice, and these were, from their wet state, she could not keep them on.

"—I'll tell you, Mabel, keep away from the rain," said Elias. "you need not add to your misery by running so wilfully." Mabel was standing with her hands in fretful perplexity as she looked on, when she felt Mabel's garments, and saw that they were wet through.

"Oh, heavens, the storm will soon be over," said the man, seeing her extreme distress.

The boat was perceptibly floating, losing its way, though the lightning was still flashing—the thunder, rolling. A little further on, and Elias made further to Mabel, and placed her purse in the man's hand, and asked him to see for their carriage.

"Oh, yes, and welcome, ma'am; but the money I'll not take a penny of; that young lady has made me quite ashamed of myself, please."

The man stepped manfully out; and in a shorter time than they had deemed possible, returned with the carriages, which had been long waiting. Not far had the party to walk, the high-road bounded the woodland there.

"Drive home, as fast as it is possible to go," said Lillas. She was literally obeyed; the horses were covered with foam when they drew up at Beechwood.

"Will you see Miss Somers undressed, Mrs. Abney, whilst I write a note to Dr. Merridan?" said Lillas, in a cold, displeased tone.

"Pray, do not send for him, Lillas," remonstrated Mabel, "wait and see first whether I have taken cold."

"Go to your room instantly, Mabel," said Lillas imperiously, with a manner so unlike her usual pleasant self, that Mabel looked at her in surprise as she moved to the door, where Lillas ran to her to kiss her.

"If you did but know how angry I feel with you, you would not wonder at my speaking harshly; now go this instant, and get all your wet things off."

The Doctor and Mr. Ferrand arrived about the same time, and received the account of Mabel's most unwarrantable exposure from Lillas; who insisted upon it that Charles should lecture her severely.

"Go off with the children!" she exclaimed, in mirthful amaze; "'tis regular broad farce. You only suggest it, Doctor, I know you do not mean it. I feel so perfectly well."

"I presumed that suggesting would be sufficient," said he, in a bland voice; "where it is not, we *order* persons to do so and so. It is scarcely worth while for you to stay for *that*."

"It is not, for I have a great dislike to being coerced. I shall go the less reluctantly because you are all very unpleasant people to-night; scolding and lecturing almost sufficiently to rouse up the spirit of the British lion in me, only that he is such a silky, tame thing, that he can scarce roar at all. Even Liliás is cross." She laid her hand upon Liliás's shoulder, and stooped down to look into her face, with such sweet, winning earnestness,—“Even Liliás has given me, for the first time, harsh words.”

Liliás looked up, smiled, and kissed her; but said,

“Though I kiss you, I am still very angry. You ought not to do such things, Mabel; the only one of your name that is left for us to love and care for, should prize her life, not jeopardy it for a vagrant, gipsy child. Say it was wrong, that you would not do it again,

and I will forgive and receive you into favour once more."

"I cannot say, Lillas, that it was wrong, nor that I would not do it again; but I *will* say, that I am most truly sorry you are all so displeased with me."

Lillas dropped the hand she held with a gesture of impatience, and for the first time Mabel looked hurt, wounded. She bent down again.

"Do not go to rest angry with me, Lillas! Come to my room and say that you forgive me—will you, Lillas, dear?"

And she kissed her hand and cheek entreatingly.

"She shall," said Charles, "though I'm excessively angry with you, myself, I do not intend any one else to be so, save and except *one* individual whom I shall communicate with in the morning."

"Well, do not 'set down aught in malice.' Now must I *really* go, Doctor?" she asked as he began to look impatient.

"*You must*: to your warm bath, and warm bed, and your sudorific, and you will keep in bed all to-morrow. Let me feel your pulse now, though I shall pay you a visit in your room before I leave."

She extended her rounded wrist.

"I know quite well that you are jesting about keeping in bed to-morrow."

"I am not; ill or well you keep your bed to-morrow, lie still, and drink gruel."

"Mercy—do have mercy, Doctor, you are determined to punish me. Well, as I may not come down all to-morrow, I must have one waltz to-night. Cousin, come waltz with me, as some little compensation for all this crossness. Leonora, play to us, will you?"

Charles stood up with her, and gaily they circled round the room till the Doctor peremptorily forbade it, and ordered her instantly away to bed.

"I go—I go," she said, laughing and retreating to the door, gracefully and smilingly curtsied her "good night" to them all.

When the Doctor went to her bedside at eleven o'clock, she was fast asleep, her pulse and breathing, calm as a sleeping infant's.

"If she is as well as this in the morning, Mrs. Abney, I shall have no fear but she will escape evil consequences. I shall be here early to see her. Of course you'll keep her in bed."

CHAPTER XIII.

“He forgot, when by her side,
That she could mortal be.”—*Anon.*

A MORE than usually important motion had been brought forward in the House, on the day succeeding that of which we last wrote, and a prolonged debate ensued. It was waxing late—near midnight, when one rose to reply, to whom all there accustomed themselves to defer, and listen to, when *he* spoke.

With his whole attention given to, absorbed in following the gifted speaker's arguments, sat the Hon. Wymonde Barry, on the ministerial side of the house, when it was quietly whispered in his ear, “A messenger in great haste, desires to see Mr. Barry.”

He rose and followed the official into the lobby, where he encountered his colleague, Sir William Musgrave, of Templeton.

“How goes the debate? I am but just arrived in town,” said the latter, as they shook hands.

“Splendidly—our great chief is surpassing

himself to-night—wait an instant, and I will return with you. What is it, Bartlett?" he asked as he caught sight of his own personal attendant looking anxiously towards him.

An unusual look of concern sat on the man's sharp face, as he hurriedly advanced, and said, "A message by telegraph, Sir, from Beechwood. Miss Somers is *very* ill; they desire you to go as quick as possible, and take some London physicians with you."

"Gracious Heavens!" exclaimed Sir William, "why I met her out driving only two days ago, and she looked in the very finest health. I was talking to her for ever so long. Can I assist you, Barry? Command me at once."

Wymonde did not speak, his cheek was blanched as if he'd got a death-blow. He wrung Sir William's hand, when he had mastered the shock a little, and thanked him, but in such a changed voice, that none would have known it.

"Is my cab waiting, Bartlett?"

"No, Sir, I ordered it to follow, and took the first I could find in the street."

"Take mine, it is waiting," said Sir William, with a look and tone of deepest sympathy.

He passed out, and slipping gold into the coachman's hand, bade him drive *fast* to Dr. C——'s, in —— Square, —— . You, Bart-

lett, will go to the —— Station, and order an express to be ready. Wait for me there.”

—— The cold grey light of morning was breaking through, when a carriage, on whose speed life and death might, apparently, be hanging, dashed up the Beechwood avenue. The hall-door was flung open as it stopped, and Charles Ferrand, with a countenance of the deepest sorrow, was seen standing in the entrance, to receive the comers.

A single bound seemed to carry Wymonde up the broad steps. “How—how is she, now?” he asked with faltering lip and ashen cheek.

“Very—very ill,” was his sole answer, and Wymonde turned away utterly unmanned.

“What is the malady?” asked Dr. C——.

“Inflammation of the lungs.”

He drew a long breath. “A grave one, indeed. Can we see her now?”

—— Consternation sat on every face at Somerton, when the sad tidings reached them that their young lady, their own, (too good, too bright and beautiful had she seemed, to die as others died,) was stricken with sickness, which it was feared was sickness unto death.

—— “To whom can we go in this hour of trouble, but to Him, who heareth prayer?” said Philip Abney. So all gathered together for fervent supplication to One “who is a very

present help in trouble." Scarce a face but showed traces of tears, save Philip's own; his was calm, rigid, pale, as if smile might scarce ever again soften its lineaments. Steadily he went through the service, till he came to the petition for Mabel Somers; they with one heart and one voice prayed and besought, that, if it were the Lord's will, she might be raised up to health once more.

— And as he spoke, a spasm as of one in heart agony, crossed his face.

Fervent was the "Amen, Amen," which followed, but it could not drown the low, deep sobs resounding through the church.

— Widow Collins and Ruth had been amongst the supplicants, and were now returning to their pleasant cottage, neither of them speaking much, Ruth especially seemed lost in thought.

"Mother," she said at length, "I've made up my mind what I will do; if you will consent to it, I will go to Beechwood, and wait on Miss Somers."

"There are plenty to do that, Ruth."

"Yes, mother, but none weighed down with such gratitude to her as I am. There are none who could go on, night and day as I could, giving her back her own. For I owe my life to her. I should never tire, I should

never want to sleep or rest,—I should watch whilst she slept, and be ready when she awakened. Mother, mother, my baby that died so soon, so soon that I only kissed it twice whilst the breath was in it, has tender'd my heart for all the years that I shall live. With the touch of its little soft cheek, as it lay on my bosom, the bitterness seemed to go away, and leave only tenderness. Mother, they may buy duty and service, but such duty and service as mine is not to be bought and sold. Gold cannot purchase it. Miss Somers has a right to it all. May I go?"

"You *may* go, Ruth."

And Ruth went. She saw Lillas, and at once stated her errand. Not long did Lillas hesitate, for the girl's simple eloquence went straight home to the heart. So she went in and out of Mabel's room, and she was so light of foot, so quick of perception, and so quiet in all she did, that her service was found most invaluable. Such as in her own simple phraseology, gold and silver could not buy.

Another request for permitted service to Miss Somers, followed close upon Ruth's.

"I hope you will allow me the privilege of sitting up with her, Mrs. Ferrand," urged Miss Lancaster; "none, save myself, know half what I owe to her."

— Many days passed, and it could not yet be told whether Mabel would live or die. Whether the nice balance could be re-adjusted, or whether she must perish horribly of suffocation. Daily did the physicians arrive from town, to meet Dr. Merridan in consultation. They came and went, came and went again, but he never left Beechwood. He was the watchman, whose watch no one might relieve; the sentinel, who must never quit his post; charged to note every varying symptom; assist, control, or modify it; guard against every probable, or possible phase of the cruel malady, which had wrecked health and strength, nay, well-nigh life itself.

'Twere vain, wholly vain, to attempt to depict the terrible anguish of the lover during the time of peril. Moans and unspeakable prayers were on his lips together.

“ O Lord God ! Saviour ! Controller ! Thy will be done ; but oh ! not this—not this ! ”

• To sit beside her bed, and see her eyes closed in suffering, not in sleep ; to gaze upon her cheek, crimson with fiery fever, her eyelids tremulous with pain, her parched lips gasping for breath—more breath ; to sit and behold her sufferings ; to let none of the woe he felt be readable in his face ; to rush out in a half frenzy of grief, and wrestle, as with giant

strength, against it, so that he might return calm and composed to her presence; to meet a sad, faint smile with one full of cheerfulness and encouragement; to whisper soothing words of hope and comfort, in the softest voice, (gentle as a woman in touch and speech had those few days made him,) whilst agonizing fears racked and lacerated his mind;—such was his task, and he fulfilled it.

— And rays of hope came stealing in at length; cheering words—words that made his heart bound and leap as it did the first time he clasped her to it—were uttered. With unceasing care she would do well; but care that should neither slumber nor sleep *it must be*. The fact that her mother had died so early from consumption was not to be forgotten.

“You must not let her winter in England,” said Dr. C—— to Wymonde; “but take her to Madeira. This illness is rendered a much more serious business by the consumptive tendency. *You must guard her well.*”

That very night did Wymonde pen his farewell address to his constituents. “Personal and private grounds alone,” he stated, “induced him to return to their hands the trust with which they had honoured him.”

There came a message from Mabel whilst

he was writing it : she sent Ruth to say she wished to see him.

“ Ah, truant, truant, I will be very ill again if you so run away from me. ’Tis almost an hour since you were here. I *must* upbraid you.”

Mantling back again was the exquisite smile, though the cheek had sadly paled and shrunk.

Another day or two passed, and she found out that she could *not* take those nauseous medicines unless given to her by her lover ; only *his* hand could sweeten them, she said ; and she called him “ Ganymede,” beside a string of other fondest epithets.

And now did the Doctor grow quite vivacious, and actually allowed himself a whole night’s rest. Extremely impatient was he, and pooh-pooh’d sadly when Mabel talked of her deep debt of gratitude to him ; and Wymonde enthusiastically called him “ a ministering angel.” “ They were two most ridiculous and preposterous creatures,” he said.

A costly diamond ring found its way on his finger, one morning, whilst he was feeling Mabel’s pulse.

“ Ha ! what gaud’s this ?” he exclaimed. “ Surely, Miss Somers, you are not thinking of repaying *me* ?”

Fierce as a lion did he look.

"No, dear Doctor, I am not ; simply for this reason, that repay you *I never can*. Do not draw it off again : Wymonde will be deeply hurt if you refuse to receive it from him."

"I shall, indeed," said Wymonde. "Money *cannot* remunerate for such care as you have lavished ; thanks you will not receive. Mabel (under God) owes her life to you ; *me* you have laid under infinite obligations : surely *you* may receive from me an insignificant ring without demur."

"Ah, now, Doctor, don't be ungracious," said Mabel. "I tell you what I will add to it, which I am sure will make it acceptable to you."

"Don't talk so much, Miss Somers."

"I will not. But, Doctor, you would like a lock of my hair, shouldn't you?"

"Hem—yes. Well, I think I should."

"I knew you would ; and you shall have it. Wymonde shall sever it for you. See, the ring opens underneath the inscription, and gives room for a nice braid. Now, you cannot say another word."

"*And you must not*," said the Doctor, laughing, but returning the splendid ring to his finger without any further demurring.

One of Mabel's gayest looks came back, as she asked him, when he rose to go, "If he was satisfied that Madame would *quite* approve that lock of hair."

A droll smile played about his mouth, but he vouchsafed no reply, save desiring Wymonde to command her to be silent; she would bring on a coughing fit by such incessant chattering, he said.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Nay—nay, ’tis but a passing cloud;
Thou dost but droop awhile,
There’s life (long years) and love, and joy,
(Whole ages) in that smile.”

The Warning.

THE merriest month of all the year died out, and Mabel had not left her room. But the Doctor was promising that the next day, or the next to that, she should exchange the bed-room for the drawing-room. And the day dawned at length, when the promise was to be fulfilled. Throughout the house and neighbourhood did gladness reign. Gaily the bells pealed out at Somerton; for all who knew her were of one heart and one mind, in rejoicing that she was raised up again.

It was a bright June day. The hot sun had shone on the windows and balcony of Mabel’s drawing-room all the morning, but had now passed off, leaving it tempered and pleasant in the extreme. In the spot she most preferred was placed a piled and pillowed couch, and, drawn up to it, a fairy-like table,

on which stood the most elegant of flower-receivers,—a slab of pure white marble, set in gold, with branching crystal cornucopias, enclosed in golden net-work. It was filled entirely with roses: a tiny, gay-bordered note lay nestling amongst them, which told that the offering came from Sir Humphrey Otway, to the fairest and sweetest flower of them all.

Exceedingly well had she borne her getting up and dressing; and now, with a white Cachemere close wrapped about her loose white muslin robe, was ready to be carried to the drawing-room. What a triumphal event it was: how happy she looked: the smile scarce left her face.

“ Well, now that she was all ready to go,” said Charles, with a waggish air, “ *who* was to carry her ? ”

She stretched out both her hands to Wymonde, who raised her in his arms, and carried her off, holding her close enough to feel her heart beating against him. Too easy a task was it to carry her—she was sadly reduced.

“ Oh what a deck’d, beautiful, bowery room,” she cried, as he laid her down. “ What flowers, what surpassing flowers! Where *can* they all have come from, Lillas ? ”

The display was, indeed, magnificent. The tables were laden: the brackets, the mantel-

piece, her very harp, was wreathed round with flowers, the walls festooned with them.

"Believe that they came from Fairyland," said Liliās.

"They are bright enough, but believe it I cannot; so tell me where they grew, dear Liliās?"

"Why, darling, everybody in the neighbourhood has sent *bouquets*, to greet and welcome your re-appearance in the world again; and whole piles came from Somerton. We might every one of us have been smothered in flowers to-day, if we had been so minded;—and look here what else I have for you."

And Liliās laughed merrily as she displayed a basket literally filled with congratulatory notes. "There was a perfect shower of them," she said, as she tossed them up in the air, and caught them again, ere she sat down by Mabel's side to read them to her.

Animated, and gay, and laughing, also, was Mabel.

"She *must* talk," she said: "her tongue quite ached with the unaccustomed quiet it had had of late. She must ask some questions: the Doctor need not shake his head in that reproving way, for she would be very careful—very. She was not going to turn disobedient to him now.'

And first she began to question Wymonde, as he hung over her couch,—how it was that he had never once left her to attend his Parliamentary duties ?

“ I have no divided duty now, my darling. I have resigned my seat.”

The colour flushed up, and went again on her transparent cheek, as she gazed at him, and divined his motive.

“ Nay, but it was too great a sacrifice ; and all for me—for me—Would that I could lay down my life to do *you* service ! ” and she pressed his hand fondly to her lips.

“ Live for me, Mabel—preserve it for me : I ask no more,” he said, with agitated voice and look ; and her soft eyes filled.

But the Doctor was beginning to look displeased ; and he felt her pulse, and peremptorily forbade further talking. And Mabel said, if he would *only* just let her look down into the garden, for two or three minutes, just to see the light lying on the grass, she would ask no further indulgence.

To that he gave consent ; so, supported by Charles and Wymonde, she walked to a window, and gazed down.

A faint colour rose to her pale cheek as she stood watching the fountain, and the white doves fluttering about their marble basin.

"A pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun," she murmured, rather than spoke.

Another minute or two, and her head sunk on Wymonde's breast, and her eyes closed. She had fainted.

In dismay, all too deep for words, he carried her back to the couch: motionless she lay, white as the lilies she had fastened at her waist. Scarce till then had they any of them realized the great change that had come over her. A net confined her shining hair, which gathered away from the face, showed its perfect outline, but also showed how thin it was. The long silken eyelashes lay resting on the cheek; the faultless eyebrows spanned the same fair, rememberable brow; the exquisite features were exquisite still. The sweet look had no way left her; and yet she was most changed.

Mrs. Abney and Lilius turned away from gazing at her in irresistible grief; and Mabel was carried back to bed, which she did not leave again for several days.

—Time passed on. The Doctor said, Miss Somers certainly did not gather strength as he could wish. Her cough was better,—*that* was a great matter; still, there was not that vigorous rallying of the constitution which might

naturally be looked for in one so young, and who, until her attack of illness, had been so healthy.

But yet she was equal to more exertion. Supported by the lover's arm, she could walk from room to room—nay, had even paced slowly and gently a time or two about the grounds, and visited the Doves, to the unbounded delight of the children, who had named one of them—it was the prettiest and tamest of all—Mabel “Dove Mabel.”

And when the sick couch was placed out 'mid the flowers in the balcony, as it was on warm, bright days, that the sun might shine, the soft breeze blow upon the strengthless invalid, then would Dove Mabel fly up, and, plaining and fluttering, alight upon her outstretched hand, as if, like all the rest of the animate creatures, it was attracted by the tender, loving heart beating in her gentle bosom.

The voice of mirth had died away at Beechwood; most animated and gay had the circle been; swiftly those lightsome hours flown by, now tombed in a sunny sepulchre—for the song and the dance had ceased, and the glad hearted sighed.

No lack of loving ministry was there to Mabel. The atmosphere she breathed was

one of inexpressible tenderness. The first and last thought was of and for her, night and day. As if Wymonde were not in himself enough, with his earnest eyes fixed ever in solicitous watchfulness on her face, save now and then, when some added proof of debility came more forcibly before him, then for a little would his gaze pass from her, perhaps to note some "gay castle in the gentle summer clouds sail slowly by;" but ever, when he turned to her again, would her eyes rest on him, as with an angel's pity for sorrow she could not assuage; and her hands would draw him softly down to kiss her, though by the most absolute self-command alone, could his lip shadow forth a wintry smile. Beautiful was it to see them together now; the love had long passed by all doubts and fears,—a part of both had it become, and shrank not from expression: unthought of was it that there could be faintest rebuke for the frequent kiss, the hand-clasping, the reclining upon him. Earth's passion was weeded away from it, leaving it pure as the angel's,—holy as it was intense.

And now did the Doctor grant permission for her to see some of her many friends; and first of all came the Gearys and Philip. Kind Mrs. Geary could not speak, but warmly kissed her; Mr. Geary took her hand, and in

a hearty, cheerful voice, bade "God bless her;" whilst Philip gazed at her with unutterable interest. And the fatherly minister drew up a chair to her couch, and told her how happy it made him to see her looking so "herself again." Mabel's cheek was brilliant; her lips of the vividest colour; sadly often had they become so of late. "Constant were the inquiries from her people as to when they might expect to see her amongst them again."

"Every one is *so* kind—so very kind," she gently said; "but whether I do or not come soon, I trust that you and Philip will come *frequently to me*," she added, in too low a tone for even Wymonde to catch her words.

"Certainly we will, my dear young lady, if you wish it," he replied, with an earnest glance upon her. A little more conversation—but her voice was growing feeble; she motioned Wymonde to support her, and her head sank down in another fainting fit.

It is impossible to depict the distress these attacks occasioned, showing as they did such extreme debility. They were very peculiar; her eyes closed; her breathing became imperceptible—a rose-leaf would not have fluttered on her lips; as she was placed, so she lay. Indescribably lovely did she look on this day; with nothing of the pallid hue which so commonly

attends fainting, the rose's finest crimson was on her cheek—the violet-veined lids looked as though they had shut in playfulness, and would open again in absolute mirth when that sweet feigning was over. Yet was there something in the profoundly still and fragile form, hushed, moveless, robed in flowing white, which rebuked the thought, and you believed that you were gazing upon some spiritual being, buried in softest slumber.

Yet not so. Mortals weep not over sleeping angels, and tears *are* falling fast. *One* face is bending over her, full of anguish, dark with woe.

From that day forwards, many of these fainting attacks came upon her.

And now was Athalah Barry's marriage to take place. Week after week had it been deferred in the lingering hope of Mabel being able to join the bridal party, but at her own request, they waited no longer. Wymonde left her to be present at it,—to accompany his happy sister to the altar, and see her hand laid in that of her noble bridegroom. On the third day he would be back again.

CHAPTER XV.

“Is there no power in love? Hath love no chain
 Of linkèd strength to hold the spirit here?
 Has earth no pleasant places to detain
 One heavenly nature from its higher sphere?”

Lament.

'TWAS on one of the mornings of Wymonde's absence that the Doctor was paying his usual early visit to Mabel, after a lengthened interview with Charles in the library. All, save Mabel, had remarked how cross and irritable he had become of late. A sort of dry, short manner had stolen over him, that was quite repelling; though *with her*, he was all gentleness, full of pleasantries, and smiling encouragements, and cheerful allusions to the speedily-coming time when she would be quite independent of his medical *surveillance*—when she would welcome him only as her friend, not her physician.

He sat and chatted in cheery, sprightly fashion for some time: at length, rising to leave, he said:—

“Oh, by the way, Miss Mabel, Dr. C—— is coming into the neighbourhood, to-day;

and, as he saw so much of you during the time you were really so ill, I shall bring him with me this evening to call upon you, now you are so much better."

Her clear eye rested on him as he spoke, and she saw through the transparent artifice in an instant. Gently, but firmly, she declined seeing Dr. C——.

"There is no one in whom I should place the perfect confidence that I do in yourself, dear Doctor, therefore forgive me declining to see any one else. Now, come and sit beside me: I wish to have some talk with you, to question you."

"I—I have an engagement, Miss Somers, and cannot possibly stay, this morning," he said, utterly aghast.

"I will not detain you long: a few minutes you can grant me, I know."

An hour afterwards, Lillas, who had come in from the grounds with her eyes sun-dazzled, was passing up the stairs, and encountered the Doctor descending them. Some question she put to him concerning Mabel—how he had found her.

"Pardon me not answering you now, Mrs. Ferrand," he said, as he passed hastily and quickly by.

But the momentary look showed Lillas that

every muscle of his face was catching and quivering with violent emotion. Wondering what had caused it, she went direct to Mabel's room. Still and pale she lay, her eyes closed, her hands folded, as if in prayer. She had been shedding many tears: they were lying undried on her cheek.

"Shall I sit beside you, darling?" asked Liliás, softly, kissing her.

Her eyes opened. Never—never would Liliás forget that look; so solemnized, so raised, so unearthly was its expression.

"Not now, dear Liliás, thank you," she faintly said; "I must be alone for a little—quite alone;" and the veiny eyelids closed, the hands folded again.

Yes—it had been told. She knew that for her there was no more health and strength; never more should her foot bound forth on the dewy meads again: but *for her*, was lingering sickness and wearying pain, that should day by day waste and consume her—search, and purify, and winnow her from all mortal taint and frailty; and then—heaven.

Wymonde returned. Grudgingly had he left her side. Full of maternal kindness was the letter which he bore from his mother to his Mabel, telling of the sunny home they would together form in some bright southern

land, far from keen air, and frost-wind's breath, where health would come back, and strength be hers once more.

"Soon must we have a physician's consultation, my Mabel, as to where you are to winter," said Wymonde, after reading the letter to her. "We will carry you away before the days begin to—"

Something was there in her gaze which arrested the words upon his lips, made his heart go faint with dread.

"Come near to me, Wymonde: nay, shrink not from me now. Gather me very close to you; let your cheek touch mine. How I love you no words *can* tell.—There is something I *must* tell you. You *must* know it. *When winter comes, I shall be where there is no winter.*"

——Cloudless was the day; the deep, dazzling blue of August was in the sky; yet was there darkness at noontide in the chamber where Wymonde Barry had entered that he might encounter with his grief. His face was buried in his hands; no words escaped him, save, in accents of immedicable woe, "My dream—my dream!" accompanied by a wild throb, a spasm of agony.

"My dream! my dream!"

Yes, there it was, all prefigured, foreshadowed. Yet never had it made him with-

hold his hand, or keep back his foot from pressing forward to win her. He *had* won her. Like the wingèd worker of summer, he had been laying up a store of sweets for all the days that God would mete unto him. But the spoiler had come, to rob him of his all—yes, of all.

A something of this—of fear, of doubt—the shadow of that dream, possibly, probably—had rested on his mind; yet had it ever fled away when he strove to penetrate it, to trace its shape or form. Pinnaced on his happiness, he had gazed around to see if he could discern aught lurking, which could threaten his bliss, or disturb the fountain of it; but a serene and smiling sky ever met his gaze; nothing was visible—not a cloud, large even as a man's hand; and he had said smilingly, "All is well: the morning breaketh, and shadows flee away." Yet whilst he spake, the shadow loomed and fell again.

Now he knew the worst. His Mabel had asked him to resign her to her native heaven; had told him that she must glide—glide from him; that he might not hold her back. The decree had passed; and friends, and fortune, and beauty, and rarest gifts, were all in vain—in vain to save: they could not keep her back from death one hour.

Oh, that swelling, choking agony ! oh, that woful spasm ! as again he cried :—

“ My dream ! my dream ! ”

Thought piled on thought rose on his mind. The past, the present, and the future lay mapped and stretched before him :—how he had watched, and waited, and striven, and won ; how he had been rewarded by the priceless gift of Mabel Somers’s love ; how he had lived and basked in her smiles ; how—how he must live on in the coming desolation, with her voice for ever hushed, her eyes for ever closed !

And the hours went on. Noon had given place to night, with all her peaceful stars. And still the throb and spasm came, as he cried—

“ My dream ! my dream ! ”

CHAPTER XVI.

"That I should live to say, I HAD,
And have not in possession still."

SPENSER.

"So long as there seemed any reasonable hope left, I would not mention such a subject, make such a request; but—Mabel tells me—she tells me—I have struggled against and shut out the conviction; my brain seems scarce steady enough to bear up under it. Do *you*. Mr. Ferrand, believe that—think that—that—"

"Would God I could say I didn't, Barry. You must yourself see how she droops and wastes. I could weep like a child when I think of the miserable cause of all this illness and this sorrow."

Earnestly had the two been conversing. The deepest dejection was on the lover's face; his brow was corrugated with pain; into his voice had come strange hollowness of tone.

"*I dare not* look back," he said, as he rose from his chair to pace the room in uncontrollable agitation; "but, for the brief space of time that she is still spared to me, I *must* have

her unmistakeably my own ; I must have the privilege of being always beside her. Now, I dread the night coming, for the separation that it brings. I know she could not be better ministered to, have kinder, more faithful nurses ; but I am shut out. She is mine : her days and hours are numbered, and I may not be always with her.

“ This is much, but it is not all. Mabel will pass away to her father, whom she dreams of, thinks of, night and day ; and I shall have but her memory, blessed though it will be, to rest on. Up to the hour of her departure, she is my pledged wife, but Death nullifies pledges. Our attachment is deep now, but it has not, cannot have the sanctity, the indissolubleness of the marriage covenant. Have I made my meaning plain ? That I wish to hold fast my claim to her even when she has entered into Heaven. If she were my wife, if it were but for a day, Death could not annul the contract, would only set the last final, solemn seal, upon it. I think I could stand beside her senseless clay with more of resignation, less of absolute despair, if I had the certainty that we should be companioned together for eternity.”

“ You do not speak, Mr. Ferrand. Is not

my calamity a heavy one? Am I wrong in seeking this alleviation for it?"

"Say no more, Barry. *I* will not oppose your wish—it is very natural; and I should not anticipate the Colonel will—but wait till I have spoken to him. To-night, or in the morning, he will be here. It is, to be sure, going against the strict letter of Mr. Somers's will, but it must be remembered that he could in no way foresee such a lamentable combination of events as has occurred; his aim was to secure his daughter's married happiness, in not permitting it before she was twenty-one."

The Colonel arrived that night, and after a prolonged conversation with Charles, assured Wymonde of his hearty acquiescence in his wishes.

"God help us all," he exclaimed, with glistening eyes, "what frail, helpless beings we are. To think how we were all laughing and jesting about your marriage, at Christmas; and now I'm called upon to lay her hand in yours, and she lying on her dying bed. A mournful bridal—a very mournful bridal, indeed, Sir; but I honour the feeling which prompts you to urge it, and Heaven forbid that I should throw an obstacle in its way."

All the Colonel's vivacity had left him. He *could not* reconcile himself to Mabel dying, he said, "ill as it became any one to question the decrees of the Most High."

Even beside her couch, words of murmuring at the dispensation were sometimes heard.

"God knoweth best—God knoweth best, dear uncle," doth she ever say, though her voice sinks and dies away in mournful faltering as she speaks the words.

* * * *

"Yes, my Mabel, one boon is left in your hands to grant, and you *will* grant it, I know. I ask for it, crave it, will take no denial. Let me, my heart's darling, call you wife, hear you call me husband. Faintly will your dear voice syllable it, I know, but not too faintly for me to hear. Deny me not, my gracious, womanly Mabel; deny not the one consolation resting with you, the softening balm for this deepest trouble which has come upon me. I say *upon me*, for you are going home to Heaven, but I must live on here. Will you not sweeten that life for me, make it bearable by the thought of the angel wife awaiting me when it is spent? Not for your sake, not at all for yours, do I ask it, but for mine alone.—Your father; yes, my sweet love. I know well that he prohibited your marriage under

twenty-one. But could he contemplate Death stepping in between you and the one to whom you are affianced? Have I *ever* led you wrong?"

"Never—never once, dear Wymonde."

"Think you, Mabel Somers, that I would do so *now*? Believe it not—believe it not. Wed me to-morrow, Mabel, I entreat you."

He was kneeling beside her couch, her two hands clasped in his, his cheek and eye burning with the earnestness of his appeal to her.

"Give me time to think over this, dear Wymonde; give me a night's consideration," she asked.

"I will, but you must wed me to-morrow. Let my deep fervent affection plead for me. Think, darling, what a shattering of all my hopes, what a casting into air of all my life's plans your illness has brought. Think what dreams have buoyed me up, that are now all nothingness.

"You were to depart with *me* in a bridal chariot; I, the happiest man, the proudest bridegroom, that ever plighted faith, was to bear you away, a most smiling, joyful bride, whilst all around was flower, and feast, and song. A dream of triumph was it—a charmed vision. But it hath all swept by, and I wake to what? faint—faint, and reft I wake, for

you are gathered to the angel-band, and I'm alone—alone. *How* am I to bear it? My home, whilst you are here, is by your side; but where can my home be when you are gone? *I shall have no home.* A dreary future, and a sad, sad hearth, where I may sit and gaze at ashes that have once been embers, is all that will remain to me. Condemn me not to this. To live only in the Past—Picture-land though it be—Shadow land it is,—I would have something more than phantoms. Man craves a future. Give me such, Mabel, for you can. I must walk the Present unflinchingly, I must bear the burden and heat of the day; but linked to the Past with a thousand ineffaceable memories, linked faster still to the Coming, with deathless hopes.

“ I crave it—I ask it—I almost demand it from you; not so much a privilege, as a right to be claimed. Make me your husband, Mabel, and I shall have a hope over which the grave cannot close, nor death annihilate; for beyond both would be my angel-wife. Who would be hopeless with such a certainty as that before them? Who would be lorn and desolate with a heavenly bride awaiting them when the day's toil was finished, the weary journey over?

“Hearken to me, Mabel, my own gracious Mabel Somers, loved from the hour that I first saw you even for evermore, loved—wooed—won. Let not death come between us? Be my wife, blessed and sanctified in marriage.”

Quivering under his burning words was Mabel, every nerve and fibre of her frame responding to his passionate appeal.

“I am waiting, Mabel, with what sick impatience I will not say. Once before I waited for blessed words, and they came—they came in angel-whispers from your lips. Again I am waiting—before I was a meek petitioner—now, I say, I *must not be denied*.”

“The morning, give me till the morning,” she faltered out.

Lilias entered. Well she knew for what the lover was pleading. Wymonde beckoned her to him.

“Tell Mabel, dear Mrs. Ferrand, that *you* would not think, nor yet any, that she had granted too much reward, for affection, faithful and enduring as mine; affection, so true and constant, that it can never wane or change, that asketh only, at this hardest time, for an abiding contract, which will give me my own, again. Will *you* be eloquent in my behalf?”

“You must leave me alone with her, then, Mr. Barry, if I am to tell her my woman’s

view of the matter. You may rest assured your interests shall not suffer in my hands, if I can help it," Lillas added, with her frank and pleasant smile.

—Early the following morning did Ruth Collins summon Wymonde to Mabel's dressing-room. Something of the bridegroom's eagerness was in his step and air, as he obeyed the summons.

He knelt down beside her, and folded her in his arms, fervently, but oh, so gently; he kissed her hands, her lips, her brow, with the most exceeding love, the most surpassing tenderness. And then he whispered,

"This day, this very day, makes you my own wedded Mabel—mine—mine in married love and deathless. Tell me this in words; confirm, ratify it. But you need not; full well I know that ere this day's sun has set, I shall be—not the happiest—far, far enough from that—but the gratefulest of men. Yes, ere this sun has set— Mabel, my love, my love, you do not speak; whisper but one confirming word."

—He had his answer. Told it was by the sad gaze of the mournful eyes which looked into his, and saw their own trouble mirrored back a thousand-fold. Proclaimed it was by the hand which held his in such agitated grasp.

Spoken it was by the lips which faltered, quivered, trembled, as they uttered the words which bade his blossoming hope wither away at once.—There was no appeal, there could be none.—

“I dare not—dare not. Deep as is my affection for you, I dare not. Obedient and dutiful to *him* I have sought to live; obedient and dutiful I must die. For the first time does *he* stand between us. Meet him face to face I shall, and soon. *Could* I spring to him in the fulness of love which has never yet known dimming, if I had violated one command? Never shall I call you husband, hear you call me wife, upon this earth; its blessedness is not for me; I must pass away without it. Pity me, pity me very much; and, oh, forgive! and pardon me, that I may not, must not yield. These are the bitterest hours I have known since my father left me; then, I well-nigh died—*now*, your grief will kill me.—Wymonde, Wymonde, have mercy upon me. Remember, I am so feeble and so strengthless. Spare me, beloved; do not fail me now, nor to the end.”

Her heavy sobs seemed like to snap asunder the frail, slight cord which yet bound her unto life.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Must I leave thee, Paradise?"

MILTON.

To lie down sure of calm and balmy slumber ; to lose herself in gentle dreams, where love and joy were ever waking ; to rise up a most gay and buoyant being, had erewhile been Mabel Somers's lot—but *so* it was no longer. Sleep no longer came : crave it, need it, woo it as she might. Oh, those solemn midnight hours ! Oh, those long night-watches, when the world was hushed in slumber, and she alone was waking ; when all, all, save herself and her most untiring attendants, were taking their pleasant rest. Those long night-watches, when she felt to stand face to face with death. For *her* was no possibility of repose. Exhaustion would not bring it ; opiates failed to soothe her into slumber ; the power of it—of rest—had passed away. What weariness, what utter weariness she felt ; yet, for her no rest. Other sick could forget their pain ; other sorrowful their sorrow. All eyes could close, save hers.

Yet did the voice of complaining never part her lips, or murmurs once escape her. She gazed out on the yellow moonlight, wherein slept calm the flowers; and to the vaulted heavens, where hung the old Chaldean stars; or listened to the rushing winds as they swept by, from out the "haunted chambers of the night." Mournful, aye, mournful was their tone; a sighing, sobbing sound; a low, funeral wail for withered hopes, and blighted plans, and love dissevered. "As waves that break and die upon the shore, are human hopes," they said.

"For ever breaking—dying!" moaned a voice; "for ever breaking—dying!"

And her wingèd soul arose in questionings of death's unfathomable mysteries—of the unseen world to which she was hasting—of the new life that was unfolding. She was departing from light of sun, and moon, and stars. Where—where?—whither? With piercing vision she sought to look beyond those ancient stars; to look beyond them to the gateways of that other world; to track the way, to cleave the space, and could not—could not. Shadows lay heavy upon her woman's heart and mind. She was borne down, overwhelmed with ghastly fears and phantoms, which, though vague, intangible, spake terrors. She, long a dweller

in a realm of light and sunshine, was travelling through a dark and dreary wilderness, bound unto a cross of suffering and pain.

Most sorrowful had grown the sunny face, and often was it stained with tears. Vain, vain was earthly aid and help in such a combat of the soul! else would not those around, who watched her ceaselessly, have wept and prayed in vain.

— And now did Margaret Fisher return from Italy. Not an hour elapsed before she was at Beechwood, pleading, almost breathlessly, for some withheld happiness which Miss Somers was denying.

“ — *Do* let me come to be with you, to help to nurse you, to sit up at night with you — *I must do it.*”

“ You are not strong, Margaret; I cannot permit it.”

Margaret’s thoughtful face grew troubled, pained.

“ I am strong and well, now, thanks to *you*, Miss Somers; and I am happy, thanks to you again. All I have and am, I owe, under God, to you. I have accepted your benefits; received all your kindnesses; have earned a fair title to be grateful; and grateful I am. Gratitude is not dumb, though it may not, perhaps, have much to say. Neither does it like

to sit with folded hands, though, perhaps, there is but little it can do. I would fain be doing something. May I, Miss Somers, stand at the door of your room to admit those who, more favoured than I, you permit to come about you? May I be your door-keeper?"

"No, Margaret—no, you may not; but you shall come and sit with me to-night; and you shall bring your portfolio, and show me what you have been doing; and you shall talk and read to me, with that soft low voice of yours, and let it medicine me to sleep; and often you shall be with me. Now, are you content?"

Tears are dropping fast from Margaret's eyes, as she thanks her.

"I know so well what it is to have sleepless nights. Often and often have I risen to get a book, whilst the tedious hours passed by; or kneeled down to pray impatient prayers for patience under the sad weary feel."

"Tell me, Margaret, did you ever on those wretched nights of yours, *see anything which no one else could see*, a veiled presence standing beside your bed?—a shadowy figure—a phantom? You know it is nothing; another might stand on the very spot it occupies, yet, in a moment, is it there again."

"I never saw it, Miss Somers, or hopeless

and most friendless as I was, I should have thrust forth my hand in welcome to it."

"No, no, Margaret, you would not; it is far too awful. Shudder and tremble, *flesh must*, at the deep solemn gaze for ever fixed upon you, as it looms nearer and nearer; and you know that it will never leave you—never go away till you go with it. That, shrink as you may, it *will* take you by the hand at last, and bid you 'come.' O, how much the dying see and hear, that is all unheard, unseen by those in health and strength! But, Margaret, I have made you look quite sad. Do *you* talk to me, and tell me about Rome, and Venice, and Florence. Where is it your heart lingers most?"

No personal suffering ever made Mabel forgetful of others; her most loving tender nature, sickness could not change. Her interest in all around her was as true and kindly as it had ever been in her palmy days of health and strength—days which, in the dim quiet of her still, sick-room, seemed scarcely to be realized, believed in. She would sometimes question Wymonde as to whether *they had been*, or whether they were pleasant fantasies, lying back in some green and sunny land of dreams. But she ever grew faint with talking—faint and tired; and needing rest, as a bird,

whose wing has been overtaken ; so her head would sink gently down upon his breast, and her eyelids close ; soft kisses did he seal them with, and fond lulling words of deepest tenderness.

So she would lie and take her rest. The gracious slumber refused of ungentle night, the benignant day would give.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXCELSIOR.

MUCH were both Mr. Geary and Philip with Mabel; her eye and smile beamed grateful welcome to whichever of them came to minister with holy words and prayers, with gentle messages of love and peace, to her troubled storm-tossed mind. Freely and ingenuously she laid it open; her distressing doubts and fears; the haunting terrors which were scourging her so cruelly; the yearning, the quenchless yearning she felt to live for him whose soul was knitted with her own; the rebel thoughts which would flow in, because death, and not life, was allotted to her. And sudden falterings would come, and quick tears gush at the inevitable doom before her.

Ever did Mr. Geary's countenance seem to wear a benediction when he looked at, spoke to her. Full of benignant, most fatherly tenderness, his every tone and word. Soon did his tears glisten when hers came. Often did he need the comfort which he came to administer to her. But Philip's very heart and soul

were in his spiritual offices of consoler—comforter of human griefs and fears. No cold words chilled the feeble aspirations ; no harsh ones followed the confession of fleshly weakness ; in all he said was such gentle pity ; in every look and sentence breathed such warmth of human sympathy. The three-fold cord by which he drew the trembling thoughts to heaven, was Love. “For God so loved us,” was ever on his lips to the weeping trembling heart. What depth and fervour of supplication lay in his prayers for Mabel : that resignation might be granted to her ; that all doubting shivering faith might leave her ; that death’s bitterness and filmy terror—in the certainty that she was going home, home to the Father’s house—should over her have no power. That, in committing all that deep burdening sorrow, into the hands of the Divine Being who, in infinite love, had sent it, Heaven’s peace might be breathed upon her mind, and abide there.

Thrilling was the power of his intense earnestness ; the soul kindled under it, as with the altar’s holy fire. He seemed to raise it, bear it up into the very presence chamber of Him who, himself undergoing the very extremity of human grief and pain, bids all the mourners, the weary ones and sorrowful, come to Him.

And peace came down at length, and resignation. The clouds dispersed, never more to gather. The Morning Star of faith and hope rose up—rose, never more to set. The day-spring from on high had dawned, and she beheld the pure bright heavens.

——A little longer time, and not alone the lover—he was half delirious with joy—but all around her perceived a change, a sudden kindling up of strength, and with full hearts whispered each other that health was returning—coming back once more. Her eyes beamed out again; a rose-like lustre bloomed afresh; a sort of joy of gladness breathed out from her. Hope, like the prophet's gourd, sprang up at once. Yes, life's lamp had been burning feebly for a season, but 'twas re-trimmed, re-lit, and 'twould burn on. In vain the Doctor shook his head, and muttered about the "Indian summer," and "the deceitfulness of consumption;" not one of them would listen to him, or believe him.

Mabel was sitting out in the sunny balcony, not pale nor drooping; her cheek was glowing with the richest dye of beauty. Wymonde was beside her; they had been speaking low together. Something at length he said about the flowers lying in her lap; some most lovely

ericas, which Sir Humphrey Otway had himself brought for her.

“He would compass sea and land to give her but five minutes’ pleasure,” he said, with a mingled smile and tear, as he presented them.

“Are not they beautiful—beautiful?” she said, as she gathered them in her hand, and bent over them. “Wymonde,” she murmured, “they make me think of the Amaranthine ones, ‘that do in the other climate grow.’”

A look of exquisite pain passed over the lover’s face; her words had come with such a sudden pang upon his heart, wherein the new-born hope was locked, that health was returning; that for him she would be raised up, restored. Was it not almost a certainty? was it not time to speak—to tell her that years were in store for her? Long years she would live for him—for him, and all beside him; for none could spare her. And speak he did; with kindling eye, and assured tone, he told her of all the happiness that was coming back.

“Nay, nay, ’tis happiness that may never be,” she said, with faltering voice, and brimful eyes; “go I must—*I must*. Let me go, Wymonde; call me not back again with earthly love. I am a feeble dying girl, ‘a

dweller in a house of pain.' Let me depart to lose the pain, the weariness, the suffering. Be strong to me, and help me to die?"

What an appeal she uttered, with flagging breath, and burning cheek, and hand pressed upon her side, where lay that aching and deep-seated pain—that he would *not* stand between her and death; that he would cease to weep and pray against it; for weeping and praying were in vain.

She lay reclining on her cushions, gazing on him, her eyes filled with light; high, lofty, spiritual: (back, back might he never win her; heavenward had she set her face.)

"Listen to me, Wymonde: for much have I to say, and soon am I exhausted. *Can* you believe, when I tell you, that angel visitants are about me now? Doubt it not, Wymonde, for so it is: and they call me—me, 'Sister!' I, from this slow wasting, and this deepening pain, shall pass away to them; where no pain is. They, like us, have been clothèd with mortality, they say. But Wymonde, they whisper-also—and this it is has made me seem so happy, refreshed my drooping heart, and made *you* think Life's powers were rallying back—that *pure Love is not for Death*. This—this it is. Yes, Wymonde, there are heavenly bridals. They, who in heart and soul

wed here, *whose minds are one*, in Heaven re-wed in fullest rapture. *There*, shall you claim me again, *there*, shall I be your bride : not as the fainting, sinking, dying Mabel, but owning angel-form, and being : fairer than aught you have ever seen or imaged. Brief marriage-time would ours have been, and very sad and sorrowful ; tears would have stained it sadly,—funeral flowers have crowned me, the wailing dirge outsounded strains for the dying.

“ But a prophet eye is given me ; and I behold a marriage-celebration in the heavenly kingdom. By the light from silver lamp and golden scone, I see a bridal train ; and in the midst are two, hand-linked together. There is a golden ring, and a ruby crown ; there are flashing jewels, beside which, the diamond’s ray is dull ; there are purple robes, and shining garments ; there are celestial odours, and music, such as only heaven hears. A blessing holy and complete is spoken, and echoed by all around. A signet is affixed, and a voice crieth ‘ Now, thou art mine ! ’ My heart throbbed—leaped wildly in my vision ; for, Wymonde, that voice was—*thine*.

“ Yes, our marriage contract set aside on earth, will be fulfilled in heaven. Well may I look, seem happy with such promised joy ; the

bitterness of death is past. Oh, my beloved, look on; these present evil days must be no more remembered,—sad they are, and dreary; but see, the sun is shining above, beyond.”

—— The new-born hopes were quenched; the last, last ray died out. The fiat had gone forth that the body should return to the earth, “the spirit to Him who gave it.” No longer was it possible to mistake the insidious workings of that fell disease, consumption. “The English Death,” as it is emphatically termed, the all but transparent hand, and the marble cheek, when that fiery glow ebbed back, discoursed to the dullest eye, the rapid pulse showed how fast life was burning out; the distressed breathing told its own sad tale; the hollow cough rung out a knell to all who heard it. “All that of her *could* die, was dying.”

She was ripening fast for heaven. The sorrow that had tendered her, the love which had quickened her, the kind deeds she had done, the sickness she had alleviated, the trouble she had soothed, had all aided to build her up, and fit her for a higher state of being. Lofty and complete had been her moral nature: faith and patience were now added to perfect the work, to finish it—to free it from

every lingering stain of earthliness, ere she joined the angels and archangels in the better kingdom.

O how far before *him* she was : he tried, he strove, toiled after her in vain (even as his foreshadowing dream had prefigured to him that he should do). Stone-like grief lay heavy on his heart ; to her resignation he could not attain—nor to her peace. With him had deep sorrow been doing its work : health had gone from his cheek, spirit from his eye, firmness from his step. In the very flood-tide of love and happiness the blow had come.

And now did Mabel turn her without delay to the fulfilment of the earthly duties yet calling upon her. The family solicitor was summoned, and soon all was arranged. With a most clear and discerning mind, did she devolve her stewardship to others.

The Somerton estate and Hall was bequeathed to Mrs. Abney for her life-time ; then were to pass to Charles Ferrand and his descendants, with the express stipulation that a part of every year should be spent there, and the name of Somers added to their own.

All were remembered ; not one forgotten. Miss Lancaster would go to her husband, a well-dowered bride. Margaret Fisher, and Ruth Collins, their future was mapped out and

cared for ; but should unforeseen contingencies arise, that further aid or help was needed, then was application to be made to the Hon. Wymonde Barry. It was registered, that throughout his life he would befriend them.

A fund was set apart for her *protégées* at the Crowhurst.—“None must find any difference from her death,” she said.

A certain specified amount of property was to accumulate for the purpose of erecting and endowing an “Orphan’s Home,” in Somerton, for the educating and forwarding in life of twenty fatherless and motherless children.

When the time for it came, Mr. Ferrand, Mr. Barry, and Mr. Abney were to be associated together for the purpose of carrying the plan into effect. An ornamental and elegant, as well as commodious building was to be erected for the Orphan’s Home. And *necessity* was to constitute the first claim, and the best in those admitted.

One charge did she devolve solely upon Wymonde,—he was to seek out, to educate, and in every way care for and promote the welfare of the little wretched gipsy child, who to them had been the innocent cause of so much ill.

—— “To *me*, Mabel, shall you bequeath your Memory—your Bible, and “Hassan,” said Wymonde.

"I will, dearest Wymonde. Is there nothing else you would care for?"

"Nothing," he returned, calmly; but suddenly, burying his face in her cushions in an agony.

Never again to be ridden was "Hassan"—never; he, who her had borne so delicately, so daintily and proudly, must bear no other weight. To range, in unchecked freedom at Bulegh, was henceforth to be his lot.

And Bulegh—antique, beautiful Bulegh—which she so delighted to speak of, and fondly dwell upon its fresh, sparkling streams, and magnificent woods; its purple hills and shady dells, was henceforth to be a consecrated place—a shrine, a memory, green, verdurous, for ever—hallowed to her, whose love, time-born, but not time-bounded, its master had won. There—where her earthly home was to have been—there, where well-nigh worshipped, a rejoicing course her life was to have run,—there, was her name to dwell for evermore, imperishably embalmed in deeds of good and use. Patterned upon Somerton, was Bulegh henceforth to be.

Never might she enter its stately hall as its mistress, or grace its grand rooms with her bodily presence. The echoes were long since dead, which her sweet voice had wakened, and

never should it waken them more ! But she would be there, a hovering presence,—all pervading, unseen, unheard, but alway felt. A name merely, but a name which the poor, the ignorant, the wretched, might daily rise up and bless.

A weary, drooping creature, whose every breath was drawn with pain, in whose veins throbbed fever, and whose cheek wore death-bloom, had, in the midst of her suffering, thought for *them*, and cared for them, because they *were* poor, and ignorant, and uncared for, and must not remain so. Amongst them might she never dwell ; but he who had woo'd her for his earthly bride—he, who was sealed to her, living or dying, had received his mission from her lips.

Mr. Ferrand had, in the early stage of Mabel's illness, written to Sir James Dysart, stating how alarmingly ill she was ; naturally supposing that he would, if not yet altogether turned from his anger against her, yet be desirous of evincing some degree of interest in her recovery, from what was in itself so dangerous. To the letter no answer was returned.

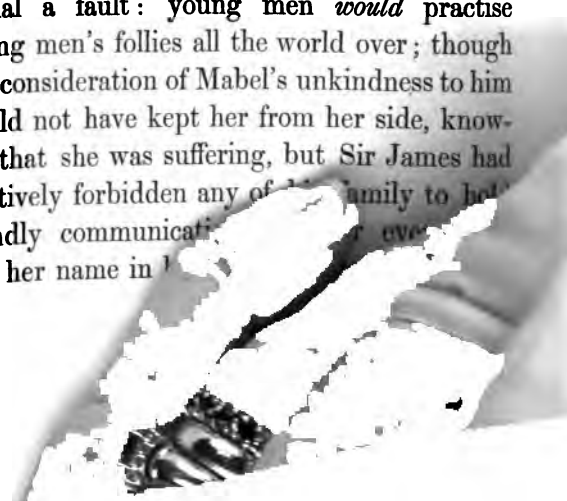
Again, by Mabel's express desire he wrote, when her illness assumed so serious a character, telling of its not only possible, but very probable termination.

Time passed; and as no reply was vouchsafed, both he and the Colonel considered that any further advances on their part were quite uncalled for, — that neither courtesy nor Christian charity, required them to take any other steps to conciliate one so cold and haughty.

But Mabel's mind was deeply troubled; that there was nothing to forgive, she knew; but she was dying, and ardently desired to die in peace with all.

With fast falling tears, she asked Charles to write once more, and entreat Sir James to see her, if but for an hour.

Wistfully, eagerly did her eye glance over each morning's letters; and at length a reply came, but not from Sir James. Mrs. Vavasour wrote; kind, and even affectionate, were her words towards Mabel; but she said—
“ They had all deemed her conduct to Riverstone very harsh and unjustifiable for so trivial a fault: young men *would* practise young men's follies all the world over; though the consideration of Mabel's unkindness to him would not have kept her from her side, knowing that she was suffering, but Sir James had positively forbidden any of his family to hold friendly communication with her, or even mention her name in his presence.”



The letter fell from Mabel's hand ; a long fainting fit followed ; and then, death-like lassitude and exhaustion.

Deep was the wound ; and balm for it—none.

A room was now always kept prepared for Dr. Merridan at Beechwood, as he, in his untiring *surveillance*, more generally than not passed the night there. And but few of the night hours went by, without gentle inquiries at Mabel's chamber-door, as to how the time was speeding with her.

Lilias and the Doctor met in her room one night :

“She had not long been sleeping,” Margaret said, “and she was moaning, and talking so piteously in her sleep, that she thought she would be almost better awake.”

They were still standing by her bedside, when Wymonde came to the door, and Lilias bade him come in, and look at her. Faint, sad words were syllabled by Mabel,—words of meekest, most piteous entreaty to be let die in peace ; her brow was knitted, her hands tossed restlessly, and a look of almost anguish clouded her sweet, spiritual face, as she supplicated him, whose anger was darkening her waning life, to let it pass from her.

“I could be content to go and kneel at that

was it, as its numerous stone-mullioned windows, its massive balustrade and parapet, its fantastic chimneys, and picturesque doorways of solid oak, bore ample testimony to. At the back of the house lay formal, but well-kept grounds, enclosed in a broad belt of shrubbery, which effectually screened from view the lofty stone wall surrounding the whole. Something of a sombre character was given to an otherwise cheerful lawn, by the large, dark ilex trees which studded it; yet was it tasteful in its own quaint style. Its winding walks and alleys were finely curved; its shrubs and flower-plots, its ancient sundial, and bowers of topiary-work, artfully disposed; and it was exquisitely neat. The rich turf was of the smoothest; and but few fallen leaves were visible, though October winds were piping through the woods.

A fine, cheerful morning had come. Sunshine streamed broadly into the windows of a spacious breakfast-room, which fronted the lawn; brightly did it fall over the gorgeous Aubusson carpet, and through the pale-green velvet hangings. It was a handsome apartment, and handsomely decorated in the mediæval, or Byzantine style, of fitting and furnishing. The carved and gilded chairs; the prie-dieu standing open with its golden cross, and eccle-

siastical clock ; the finely-carved cabinet of walnut and ebony ; the pictures of saints, in costly frames, well-nigh covering one side of the beautiful Gothic wainscotting ; the exquisitely-modelled Parian ornaments on the mantelpiece, were all in admirable tone and harmony, and also in admirable taste.

A large fire burned and sparkled on the marble hearth, and cast a most comfortable air around. The room was vacant, though breakfast was laid, and the urn of richly-chased silver merrily bubbling on the table. Of delicate beauty was the porcelain—though every article of the breakfast-equipage that could be moulded of silver was so, and all of rare workmanship. An inscription in medieval characters on a bread-plate, told that the whole service was a tribute of love and esteem from the congregation of St. Margaret's, to their young Vicar.

To say that he was a popular preacher, or that he was held in high estimation, tells nothing. There was a *furor* of feeling—a fever of enthusiasm concerning him, amongst his wealthy and influential congregation. They made an Icon of him.

The Church of St. Margaret (as befitted so extensive a parish), was very large. No former minister had ever succeeded in filling

it. Now, money could not purchase sittings. The sun shone down through glorious painted windows into noble-columned aisles, all crowded with listeners to his fervid eloquence.

In vain the other clergy of the city spoke contumeliously, and lowered themselves by their too-evident jealousy of the broad, full stream of popularity on which he was borne ; in vain they clamoured "that the wolf was in the fold—that St. Margaret's had become in outward ceremonial, a Popish place of worship ; that its Vicar was smoothly and gently leading his flock down the inclined plane to Rome."

Well did that flock know, that there was not one of those invidious contemners—not one of the numerous body, having the care of souls in that large city, so unremitting in his duties, or so assiduous to win souls to Christ. He ministered to sickness ; brought consolation to the sorrowful ; prayed fervently beside, and gave absolution to the dying penitent. Zealous in the sanctuary, not less a friend was he in the homes and hearts of his congregation. Messages had he to all—to the young, to the aged, to the busy in this world's business, to the rich, to the poor, to the servant not less than to the master. "All things was he to all men," that he might save some. He sought to know what was passing in that

subtle, inner world, Man's Heart, that he might administer the spiritual food best adapted to its necessities and requirements ; so he re-established the Confessional, from the benefits of which our Church has so generally, but, he considered, so unwisely departed ;—is she not commanded to couple the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence and meekness of the dove ?—wilfully throwing aside, in so doing, her most certain means of being useful to the wavering and the timid—of recalling to better things the erring and sinful.

Admirably systematised were his schools ; most perfectly organized his wide-spreading and comprehensive societies ; none were outside their pale. From the purlieus of vice he withheld not his feet ; “ brands must be saved from the burning,” said the unslumbering shepherd, who laboured more abundantly than all.

Such unflinching zeal, such deep earnestness of purpose, *must* make its way, even without the gift of that powerful eloquence which distinguished him in the pulpit—eloquence less plausible than lofty-toned, commanding to the mind of those who heard him ; eloquence enhanced mightily by the noble presence of him who uttered it. A most imposing and dignified-looking clergyman had the Rev. Riverstone Dysart become, matured

in mind and person, and a very master in oratory. All must acknowledge, as he swept the aisles in his priestly robes, that a loftier, more sacerdotal mien and presence could scarcely be.

Not long had he been suffered to wait for a benefice. Within a few months of the Somerton rejection had he been appointed to the more valuable living he now held ; and, better still, coupled with it, the certainty of high Church preferment.

The urn had not ceased to hiss and bubble, when the door, opening noiselessly on its hinges, gave entrance to the saintly young vicar. With a firm and steadfast step he trod ; whatever change there was in person since we last met with him, was for the better ; of a more developed, manlier beauty ; robust, vigorous, yet of the finest symmetry of proportion. Yet in his ripened manhood he still looked passionless, as though the marble which had encrusted his heart in his earlier youth had now wholly set, and no tenderness, or feeling, or warmth of human love, *could* pierce to its chilly centre. A sort of living iceberg would he be ; a graceful, polished, intellectual, agreeable man in society, to whom others would gather and listen deferentially—take their tone from—quote him, yet not the less an iceberg ; of a fine, glittering, sparkling sur-

face ; but no sun that ever shone would soften, no wind or tide divert him from his course.

He walked to the window, and threw it open to look out on the cheerful beauty of the autumn morn. It was a gay and lovely scene ; the sun was gilding sward, and shrub, and tree ; the pure dew-drops showed like diamond rays on leaf and berry. A mountain ash of remarkable size, one glowing mass of scarlet fruit, stood at some little distance, a picture in itself. Over all was a pleasant animation and freshness, rarely to be seen in garden, or on lawn, in the heart of a crowded city.

St. Margaret's clock striking the hour rouses him from the gentle reverie into which he had fallen, and reminds him that more than one gay bridal, over which he is to pronounce the benediction, takes place that morning. Many are the flower-crowned maidens who come to have their nuptials solemnised by St. Margaret's vicar. A richer blessing is shed over the union, when he hath joined the hands.

After pouring out and drinking a cup of coffee, he drew towards him a salver of letters—heaped up, piled on—and proceeded to look them over. Some were thrown aside to be read at a more convenient season ; others, enclosed in envelopes bearing foreign post-marks, were perused at once, with every token of inte-

rest. He at length came to one, of which the seal instantly attracted a close scrutiny; and his lips compressed, and an indescribable expression flitted over his face, as he recognised the crest of the Somers's. Curiously he examined the address: 'twas in a man's well-defined, bold characters.

He tore it open, and saw himself addressed as "My dear Cousin." It was not possible *that* could be Mabel Somers's clear, flowing writing? It must have been penned by some hand that could scarce guide a pen—trembling with age, palsied, perhaps. And yet it *was* hers. One last effort had she made. "For weeks, and almost months, she had scarce been able to hold a pen," she told him; "but once more, and she knew it was the last time, did she take one up to ask his good offices. She was not now the Mabel Somers he had known; he must realize that she was sick and dying, and suffering deep distress of mind—weighed down with it; day and night it haunted her, embittered her peace, drove sleep from her weary eyelids, sealed her lips when she would pray.

"For Jesus Christ's sake, whose minister he was, she entreated him to mediate, and sue for her to Sir James, that he would relax his anger towards her: as it was through *him* that the

offence was taken, so through him she trusted the reconciliation might come. He must tell her uncle that she was worn and wasted to a shadow—that she was strengthless—that she was dying—and that she could not die in tranquillity, whilst his anger darkened over her. It seemed to shut out Heaven from her gaze. He must very humbly beseech him to see her; if she was ever proud, she had no pride left now; no shame should she feel in kneeling to her uncle, for he had loved her mother, and would not deny the boon of a few kind words to that mother's only child, now she was dying.

“It must needs be her last appeal; so she prayed her cousin, as he would give comfort to a deeply sorrowful heart, to set about the business with which she charged him without delay. He must not lose an hour in doing what he could, and all he could, for life was almost spent with her. Fainter and feebler did she grow, and might not tarry even for kind and reconciled words.”

Slowly did Riverstone Dysart go over each separate word and line, finishing only to commence the perusal afresh; whilst his handsome eyes dilated, sparkled—who said he was passionless, of marble?—like those of an envenomed serpent about to strike; and there arose such a gathering and blending of inconceivable

triumph and absolute Satanic hate, in every lineament and feature, as changed his fine and classic face into the aspect of one scarce human.

"Thou fool!—thou fool!" he cried, as he laughed aloud. O, the wild mockery—the intense derision of the laugh. Was he man, or fiend?

Another gloating of his eyeballs with those feeble, trembling characters—'twas a feast, a rare, a royal feast for hate; devils might sit at the board, and make merry with him—ere he tore the letter into fragments, and threw them down upon the floor—stamped upon them—ground them, as with a giant's strength, to annihilate.

Deliberately, almost hissing, as though deadly power to blight and wither lay couched in every accent, did the curse find way, the malediction fall.

"So may the enemies of the One True Church perish, all over the world! May all who would, *like her*, stand and obstruct its path, be crushed by it down into the dust, and never rise up more! May they pass away unabsolved and unforgiven! May they die in their youth and lustihood; and may their name perish with them!"

His lips yet thrilling with those malefic words, he turned and kneeled at the prie-dieu, and reverently kissing its golden cross; with clasped hands, and lifted eye, he prayed.

CHAPTER XX.

"He gleans the broken ears after the man,
That the main harvest reaps."

SHAKSPEARE.

UNAVOIDABLY late was Mr. Ferrand one night in returning home from an engagement. Desirous not to disturb Mabel by any sound, if she were sleeping, he directed the coachman to drive to the stables, where he got out, intending to enter the house by a side door.

His eye involuntarily sought her windows as he trode lightly on the thick, soft turf underneath them. She was evidently not sleeping, for the bright light in her chamber was obscured by figures passing to and fro.

"No rest for her, I fear," he murmured to himself sadly, when his attention was suddenly arrested by beholding straight before him the figure of a man, seated on a rustic bench.

He stopped involuntarily; yet, not believing it other than tree or shrub thrown into seeming outline of the human form. Yet no; the night was moonlight; and there, unmis-

takeably sat a man, clothed in dark and flowing drapery. The head was raised, but the face turned from him, directed towards the house: his own approach had evidently been unnoticed.

A strange circumstance did it seem that any one should be sitting there long past midnight; so strange, that, for a minute, Charles hesitated to advance; but, his decision taken, he moved on, and stopped full in front of the figure.

"Pray what is your business here at this unseasonable hour?" he asked, in an authoritative tone.

No answer came, but the face, which was well-nigh hidden in a large cloak, sank lower in its folds.

"I am Mr. Ferrand, and I must know who you are. So tell me your name and business at once."

The figure rose up: the cloak dropped, and displayed to his astonished gaze the face and form of Philip Abney.

Too amazed to speak, strangest suspicions rushed over Charles's mind. Form and shape they took at length, in one horrible suggestion.

The mild, gentle Philip, standing there before him, looking in the bright moonlight

the veriest criminal that ever faced a judge, was—was insane.

“What brings you here, Philip? he asked, in gentle tones, when he found words.

The ashamed eyes were raised: ghastly despair was in them. A struggle, almost a convulsion, passed over his features, but he mastered it. No word did he speak, but lifted his hand and pointed.

Its mark was Mabel Somers’s window; and Charles knew all at once—all that had been inexplicable about Philip, was now revealed; but it was a miserable secret to know.

“God help you, Philip Abney, for man cannot,” he at length said.—“Sit down, Philip, and disburden your sad heart: I shall not leave you, in the state you are. How long have you been in the habit of coming here?”

“For months,” said a voice, as from a tomb.

“You have *not dared* to say a word to her?”

“I have not.”

“Then what has been the object of your coming? Has any lingering hope drawn you?”

“None! There lives not one more hopeless than I am.”

"But a man should struggle with these things. It does not follow because you have an unfortunate attachment, that you should yield yourself up a willing victim to it."

"I *have* striven, and struggled, and prayed. Day and night has the wrestling gone on: but all in vain. God has deserted his most sinful servant."

"Courage, Philip! God never deserts us in a noble strife against temptation. You must be braver still. Rouse up your self-respect."

"I have no self-respect to rouse—none. But little has kept me from throwing myself on Miss Somers's mercy, and telling her all my madness,—for no less has it been."

"Nay—nay, I cannot credit this last avowal,—'twould be so unlike yourself. Had you been so betrayed, you *must* have forfeited our esteem."

"Man's esteem is as dust in the balance to me, an utter castaway. My sin is awful: my lips giving utterance to Scripture, whilst my heart has been torn with anger and frantic jealousy. I have outraged and violated the call I have received. My daily life has been a lie."

"You have allowed yourself to track a forbidden path; and deep suffering it has brought

you; but I am sure you are far too high-principled to be long under the dominion of this infatuation. You must leave England for a time, and go at once."

"Not till—not whilst she lives."

"Yes, go this very week. You must not see her again. For your own sake, as well as for hers, I wish you not to enter my doors once more, till you have mastered yourself. You will do it, I am sure."

"I *must* see her to-morrow: she herself appointed it, and you shall not prevent me," said Philip, almost gasping for breath with agitation. "With all the moral degradation that has come over me, I am still a man to feel. *This* you forget, Mr. Ferrand. My soul has demanded an aliment it might never have; and, when a despairing cry escapes me, you spurn me for it."

Little, indeed, had any of them realized the depth and blaze of passion lying underneath the still surface of Philip's wonted manner. Was this *he*? this vehement being, whose eye flamed, and whose blood seemed changed to a lava current?

"Be calm, Philip, and sit down."—In his excitement he had risen. "You *must* know, that in what I say I have your own well-being most earnestly in view. What certainty can

like him," said Charles, inexpressibly shocked :
"though I do believe that he is worthy—if
any could be—of her deep affection."

He laid his hand on Charles's arm. The
despairing eyes looked fully into his, whilst he
said in a low whisper,—

"Could it raise her up from her bed of
languishing, I would be content to wed them
at the altar to-morrow, and never look upon
her face again."

"Come, Philip, I begin to know you once
again. Even in *your* anguish of mind you may
give the meed of pity to Mr. Barry, I am sure."

"Pity him, did you say? Rather may I
envy him with uncontrollable envy. Have I
not seen her looking at him with all the fond
love she felt, readable in her eyes? Have I not
stood by whilst her head has been pillowed on
his breast, his arm sustaining her, whilst he
whispered privileged words of love and com-
fort in her ear? Nay, more. In my lone
vigils here, companioned only by such thoughts
as come to a hopeless and despairing man,
I have seen—*aye, often seen*, his shadow thrown
upon those blinds."

He pointed to Mabel's bedroom-windows,
and laughed that bitterest laugh of all, which
comes when we scoff and revile ourselves for
our own misery.

would also pillow her head on sharpest thorns. My duty to her ends only with her life. I will, as far as I can, guard her from every disquiet to the last. We all value and esteem you highly ; but her peace, is dearer to us than anything else."

" Do not fear for me. In her presence alone do I feel the full rebuke for what you call infatuation, I call madness. When all—is over, I shall depart from Somerton, and altogether leave the Church. No longer must the Holy God be dishonoured in his minister. I cannot wear his badge, nor officiate at his sacraments, with my heart and brain throbbing and reeling with her image and memory. I shall be driven forth like Cain, with the brand of intolerable sin upon my soul."

" I trust, Philip, you indulge in no wrong feelings towards Mr. Barry," said Charles, with a quick, searching glance.

" Ask me no more questions, lest I should tell you *that* which would make you shrink from me as from a leper. I dare not—dare not look into the foul serpent-brood, vivified and nourished in my own heart—hissing—stinging—." A shudder came over him, and he shook from head to foot.

" It would, perhaps, be asking too much from human nature to suppose that you could

suspicion of your unhappy secret, would be torture to her. She must not know it. Let her carry up her high, undimmed thoughts to heaven, unaware of this dark, sad feature in your mind's history. I am quite sure, Philip, that it would be inexpressibly painful to you, to think that *you* had caused her gentle heart one pang, you might have spared it. I dwell on this, because, in your vehement state of feeling, I cannot tell whether you have sufficient self-control to guard your secret under every contingency. We can care for you when she no longer needs our care. Are you master of yourself, if you come?"

"I am, Mr. Ferrand. The hour when my love for her was born—and it was the first I ever saw her—was born the certainty that she was not for me. The passion took root in the most absolute hopelessness: it has fed upon the smiles lavished on another; upon the bright glances which always turned to *him*; upon the blushing cheek, and low whispers, which marked their betrothal to each other. All this I forced myself to see, in the vain expectation that the might of *his* triumphant love might for ever extinguish mine, as the sun puts out the fire. Yet was it still alight, still burning on, consuming me. Leave me will it when soul and flesh sunder—no sooner.

Scorched, withered, blackened, are my life's hopes and affections. My foot is planted in dust and ashes.—But it is folly to dilate on this to you You need not, Mr. Ferrand, fear for me in my interviews with Miss Somers : those who have gone through what I have for near three years, schooling eye and speech, in sternest discipline, are likely to keep a secret well, and guard it to the end.”

Long did the two sit there, and in conversing, letting the light in upon his unhappy passion, did more calmness steal over Philip's mind. He knew that he might confide in Mr. Ferrand's kindness ; was sure that he might rely upon his judgment ; and he felt that he was raising up a helper and an ally against himself—against the infatuation, frenzy—call it what you will, that had possessed him for so long.

The moon had grown pale, and faint streaks of light were showing in the east, ere the two parted.

“ Well, Philip, I trust you,” said Charles ; “ to a mind like yours, it is sufficient.”

“ It is—I am to be trusted.”

— Charles was sitting with Mabel the next morning, when Philip was announced ; anxiously did his eye rest upon him ; but the quiet and gentlemanly young clergyman had

never looked more self-possessed, than he did when he took Mabel's hand, and retained it, whilst he inquired how she was feeling, and what sort of night she had passed. The gentle interest depicted in his face and manner, was so perfectly natural towards the young dying girl, that no one could have quarrelled with it for an instant: he bent his face down as she spoke, for her tones were becoming very low and feeble.

"She had much to say to him," she said, "and she was fortunately feeling so well and strong; would he come and sit beside her?—*would* Wymonde give up his chair to Philip for a little time!"

She smiled almost archly at him as she spoke.

"I must beg you not to require it *too long*, Mr. Abney," said Wymonde, as he rose.

There came a glow upon Philip's face as he looked up and caught Charles's warning eye.

They left the room; and Mabel, in her faint, low voice commenced talking; soon was her meaning plain to Philip,—she wished to communicate to him her last wishes for the guidance and direction of her people. She asked him, never to lose sight of Somerton, or to cease to care for it; whatever Church preferment might fall to his lot, she had bequeathed the living to his gift; and when

he bestowed it—though she prayed it might remain long in his own hands—it could never be in better—would he bestow it on some one as much like himself in opinion and character as it was possible to find?

Much she had to say respecting the schools, and the various plans that he and herself had organized. All were to be carried on—her bounty the same—nothing withdrawn, save the giver.

She begged him to stand in, and occupy her place as much as he could, so that her people might never miss her. When he felt discouraged and impatient—for very much patience did it require to deal with the ignorant and the prejudiced—would he have yet a little more patience with them, *for her sake?*

She more especially bequeathed her poor to him. To them, must he be her steward and almoner, letting care for the body go hand-in-hand with care for the soul, so that they might be led to God through thankfulness, as she herself had been, she said, rather than through suffering; to let them have holidays and recreations, so that the sons and daughters of toil might have something more for their heritage, than birth, and work, and death. Their well-being lay deeply at her heart, but she knew she could trust to Philip in all things.

She raised her eyes with all their feverish lustre and brilliancy to his as she spoke, and saw that he was struggling with overpowering emotion : " I know that you will grant me all these many askings of mine, Philip? Let *this* ratify and confirm your promise to me."

So she placed her hand within his own. Stain of earthly soil or passion there was none, in the fervid pressure of his trembling lips upon it, nor in those large tear-drops which dropped over it like rain. She took it not away as she went on speaking.

" I have felt a drawing towards you, Philip, a sisterly affection and regard, from the first time we met. Often have I wished that we had been brother and sister born, bearing the same name, living under the same roof, caring for and loving each other tenderly as brothers and sisters do. And I have fancied myself into the belief that *you* shared this hidden sympathy of feeling, that I could see evidence of it in your eye's language, hear it in your voice, when you spoke to me. And this belief it is, that has emboldened me to make these many requests to you. I thought it would give you pleasure to fulfil them for *me*, and for *my* sake, when I had passed away."

She was silent from exhaustion, whilst he was mastering such emotion as seemed as

though it must rend his heart in twain. But once more came her gentle pressure.

“We shall meet again, Philip; surer of nothing do I feel than this, that we shall meet and know each other in the everlasting kingdom, where all are kindred, and where these sad, sorrowful partings never come;—bitter indeed, do they make death. Were it not selfish, I could almost say, Heaven speed the time when all those I so dearly love may be with me again—but I *must not* say it.”

“Heaven speed the time!” was uttered in most mournful accents by him beside her.

“Nay—nay, Philip—*my brother*: to hear *that* from your lips, pains and grieves me sadly. *I must die*, but you, I trust, will be full of days, and full of blessings. I have tried, but I cannot read your future. You have not always appeared happy, Philip; a shadow has seemed to hang over your spirits, as though some sorrow was hidden in your mind. Often in our hours of quiet communion together—hours which I have so enjoyed—have I been tempted to take a sister’s privilege, and ask you what the cankering trouble was. Again and again has it been on my lips, yet I kept back, fearing to presume—and now it is too late. But, I pray God, that whatever that hidden pain was—

and perhaps, still is—it may wholly pass away; and as a sister may and should, entreat that your life may be rich in happiness—that never wearying nor thirsting for that you have not, it may pass on in serene and thankful peace unto the end.”

She sank back utterly exhausted.

Filled with love and blessedness had been her every word. She had bound him to the altar he was meaning to desert. She had devoted him to the service of the sanctuary, for as long as he should live. She had fettered him hand and foot, loyal subject to his Lord. With her soft hand's gentle pressure—with her eyes' light, holy and pure as angels, gazing into his; with her low, failing voice—with that sad deep cough—with that circumscribed hectic, she sent it home. God's faithful soldier and servant would he be to his life's end.

Yea, and in blessing others, he shall himself be bless'd. Like soft dews of heaven shall it fall back and refresh his own parched, athirsting soul.

—The Doctor arrived whilst Philip was *tête-à-tête* with Mabel. Mrs. Abney asked if time was very, very precious with him, or whether he could wait a little, ere going up to see her.

“He did not mind a trifling delay,” he said,

“if so be Mrs. Abney would not talk any homœopathic nonsense in the interval?”

“I will not, indeed, Doctor, for it always does make you *so* cross,” she replied, giving him a good-tempered smile in return for his grim one.

“You had better have some luncheon, whilst you wait,” said Charles, who chanced to be in the room. So Lillas rang, and ordered it in.

The Doctor was very comfortably discussing the chicken and sherry, when something was said by Mrs. Abney about Mabel. She feared she would be exhausted. Philip had been with her for more than an hour.

“Alone?” suddenly and abruptly inquired the Doctor.

“Yes; she particularly desired to see him alone this morning.”

Without another word the Doctor bounced up from his chair in such haste that he upset it; one stride seemed to carry him to the door, and there he bodily disappeared: followed by Charles, (leaving Lillas and Mrs. Abney staring at each other in the most blank surprise,) he crossed the vestibule, bounded up the stairs, two steps at a time, closely pursued by Charles, calling—“Doctor—Doctor, I want you.”

“I can’t stay, Sir,” was the sole reply; but

the somewhat undignified chase was closed by Charles catching him in the corridor, and pinning him fast.

"I *must* have a word with you. Do *you* know his — Philip's secret, I mean?" he asked, hurriedly and breathlessly.

"I have guessed it; but *this* I do know, that (good Heavens, Sir! how *could* you let him be alone with her?) any sudden agitation might kill her at once."

"You may come down again with me. I promised that he should be *so* trusted!"

"You did frightfully wrong then, Mr. Ferrand; no man's self-control is to be depended on under such circumstances, and least of all his, in the state he is now. A dozen times it has been on my lips to have spoken to you about him, but some false——"

Mabel's drawing-room door opened, even as he spoke, and Philip came out. He was very pale, and traces of deep agitation were on his face; but one—only one glance of his most truthful eye, told Charles that his trust had not been betrayed; that he had passed through the ordeal unscathed; that, he had proved master of himself.

"Miss Somers wished to see Mr. Barry," he said, and passed downstairs, to seek and send him up to her.

CHAPTER XXI.

"She sits and gazes at him,
With those deep and tender eyes,
Like the stars so still and saint-like,
Looking downwards from the skies."

LONGFELLOW.

THE ploughman and sower were busy in the fields, preparing for, and scattering the seed, which would germinate and wave in greenness and beauty over the early spring landscape. The summer's warmth and glory had quickly speeded by, the corn-month come and gone, the gleaner's hand fast following after the reaper's sickle. The hop's graceful, golden cones were picked, the lately teeming earth looked harsh and bare, September's skies were blue, but summer had said farewell.

— Autumn was waning. The rich dyed leaves were silently falling into brook and river, or lying in heaps in the woodland hollows, to be scattered by the winnowing winds. Frost had fallen from the clear, cold heaven, upon the flowers; and they perished at its breath.

She, who would never again see earthly summer and autumn, was still here,—she, whom the frost-wind's wing had touched so

untimely—she, of so many the bosom-flower, yet lingered on in suffering. Worn and faint with pain, yet ever patient, was she.

For her had the death-angel lost all terror; nay, his aspect had grown sweet. Ever standing by, ever bending upon her a still, fixed, passionless gaze, yet from him she now averted not her eyes, but gently smiled; and when he took her by the hand, as he would do, and said, "Come—come with me," she would make answer, "For thee, O friend, am I ready."

She *was* ready. The last shadow had passed from her soul. The throbbing, feverish trouble which had hung upon her, night and day, which had hindered sleep, and filled her soul with disquiet, had over her lost its power. She had prayed and striven for reconciliation; she had sought to win it by every means in her power; but have it she might not, 'twas denied to her.

He, whose name was written on her forehead—He, who had ordered all things for her in exceeding love, had ordained that last sad trial, and required her to submit herself in trusting, child-like repose of faith, to the behest.

"Leave *this*, and all thine other griefs; yes, leave them all, thou meek young sister, in His hands, Who, for thee, will bear them," was

whispered by the heavenly messengers, who hover round the early-called.

And in thus resigning herself, she disarmed this of its power to wound, and gradually the pain and the trouble were winnowed away from her mind.

In no way did her generous, most lovely, loving nature change under the scourging of that long sickness, and those heavy visitings of pain; still the same social, gracious being she had ever been, was she in its intervals, giving smiling welcomes to all who approached her; going out of herself, as she had always done, in warm interest for others. Nothing was unnoticed or forgotten that concerned the welfare of any who had been even remotely inwoven in her life; care for them, she must to the end.

“Will you bring Eunice with you to-morrow?” she asked of the Doctor one day; “’tis long since she has been to see me.”

He nodded an affirmative, but said, that Eunice had been there the previous week, and he did not sanction so much talking for people who were ill.

She smiled, but bade him do as she told him. —It had not been unnoted by her, that the proposed time for the Doctor’s marriage had gone by, and nothing more been said about it. Naturally enough, she concluded that her

own hopeless illness had caused its delay, and she mentioned the matter to him. The Doctor stroked his chin, as was his wont when pushed, gave evasive answers, and at last, took refuge in pettishness.

"Pshaw!—he had something else than marrying to think of now," he said.

"Well but, Doctor, I should like to know that your marriage-day was fixed. I think you and Madame must let me fix it for you—it is very presumptuous, I know, but you will *let* me do it, as I was to have been one of your bridemaids. I should like you to be married on New Year's day. Yes, that shall be the day;—it was a very, very happy day, this year, and let the next be very happy, too—all sorrows buried, and the new year set to great harmony and cheerfulness."

"Don't talk so much, Miss Somers; you'll fairly drive me crazy," was the gruff reply, as he started up with strange dimness over his sight.

"Not another word will I say, Doctor; only that you and Madame *must* just indulge me in this fancy of mine."

"Well—well, *be silent*, Miss Somers; I'm quite worried with your talking so much. It's nigh to impossible to keep women quiet," said the Doctor, energetically. To which assertion Charles responded heartily.

—— Of course, Madame offered no objection to a request thus urged ; so the point was decided, much to Mabel's satisfaction ; and she entrusted to Mrs. Abney's keeping, rich marriage gifts, to be forwarded on the day preceding the nuptials.——

Accordingly, Fraülein Eunice came. What a deeply painful contrast were the two, as they sat together ! Eunice was maturing into a very lovely girl, with a round, fresh, Hebe-like face, and a figure acquiring splendid development ; whilst Mabel, who had been so very fair, whose rich, graceful beauty had attracted every eye, looked fragility itself, she was so wasted : her cheeks were sunken, and dark shadows filled their cavities ; scarce a tint of colour was in her lips, save when the hectic burned. Yet did her eyes retain their exceeding beauty ; nay, they had more, for the lustre of immortality was shining through them ; and her unequalled smile remained,—who that saw it now, could forget its perfect sweetness, its heavenliness of expression ?

Beautiful as she had been on earth, there came across the souls of all who beheld her a foreshadowing of one yet more beautiful in heaven.

Gently did she converse with Eunice, and gratefully thanked her—for very kindly had the young girl stepped forward, and taken

upon herself many of Mabel's duties amongst her people; but soon did exhaustion come, and the Doctor signalled Eunice to rise. Mabel bent forward to kiss her, once—twice.—No farewells were spoken, though all understood that they *were* farewells;—but Eunice's lip quivered, a convulsive sob followed, and she sank back on a chair, perfectly overpowered.

"Eunice—Eunice!" exclaimed the Doctor, looking excessively annoyed.

"Don't weep, darling," said Mabel, encircling her with her arm, and printing a long, earnest kiss upon her brow,—“Don't weep, love,” and looked round with sorrowful amaze, for sobs, heavy choking sobs, were heard on every side of her; one and another was turning away in uncontrollable grief.

A corner of the veil was lifted, and something she beheld of that depth of sorrow, which would be left behind in those who loved her, when she from them had gone.

“Oh how sad—how very sad this is!” she faintly said; and a look of exquisite pain rested on her face.

The Doctor led the weeping Eunice from the room, and Wymonde came to take his proper place beside his Mabel—leave it would he never of his own free will. Tenderly he drew her head down on his breast, and soothed as

best he might; yet did he not succeed; murmured words—not spoken—fell upon his ear:

“No farewells *there*, and no pain: *when* shall I be at rest!”

Drooping he looked; changed was his manly comeliness, under the pressure of that unutterable pain, (which yet must “make no sign,”) beneath whose burden his life was passing; ’twas too much—too much!—his soul was fainting within him.

“Never did I think, dear Wymonde, that it had been in man to show such tenderness and devotion as you have done to me. Well have you fulfilled your promise, to be all to *me* that man could be to woman. I thirst to tell you all the love and gratitude I feel, and cannot; words are so feeble and so tame. When we meet in heaven—Oh the joy—the joy, my lover!—our minds will be transparent to each other—thoughts, and not words, will speak,—this dense imperfect language be for ever done with—”

What loving words she spoke to one and another!—their memory would be for a lifetime: deepest gratitude did she express to Charles, for his unceasing care of her since she had been his charge.

A little cheerful conversation did she hold with Lilius; in which she asked her not to

let the children—"my children," she always called them—forget her.

"I had not known the worth and value of a sister's love, but for you, dearest Lilius."

Again and again did she thank Mrs. Abney for her most patient and affectionate care of her for many years. Then she lay still; her eyes, beaming with almost more than human softness and tenderness, fixed on Wymonde; her hand in his; her lips faintly pouring out blessings on him.

And now, her earthly work completed—finished all,—a gracious calm stole over her, filled every avenue of thought, and bade the grief of all around, be still. Slumberous she grew; sleep fell balmily on the heavy-lidded eyes, which had asked for it so long in vain. What smiles passed over the sweet ethereal face; what low, soft words she spake, in tongue not learned here, but taught her by the hymning angels, who called her "Sister!"

Peace—Peace is the watchword of the sentinels of Heaven, as they stand at its pearly gates, and within its golden streets, watching and waiting for the blessed ones who come. Love and Peace is the burden of the mighty flood of harmony evermore filling Heaven—evermore resounding from its courts and temples—evermore caught up and rolling along

the echoes of eternity. Peace, fullest, divinest Peace was shed, breathed over the fair, saintly soul of her, who was so meekly waiting to enter in at the everlasting doors.

It was a soft, mild November day; no wind stirring; the air laden with fog—when suddenly at noontide, the sun, which had been struggling in vain with the dense atmosphere for some hours, burst forth gloriously into a very flood of golden light, and the heavy mist rolled away to the summits of the distant hills.

Mabel's couch was removed to the window, that she might bask in the grateful warmth and cheerfulness. Still a lover of sunshine was she—quietly she lay gazing upwards to the blue, clear sky.

“Is it not the Sabbath, dear Wymonde?” she asked, after a long silent interval.

“It is, my Mabel.”

“My life has been like a long, long Sabbath-day,” she murmured.

Soon she thinks she will stand a little. It is an unusual exertion of strength, but she will try; so Wymonde locks his arms around her to sustain her as she does so, and with exquisite tenderness, rests her head upon his breast.

“Faithful—faithful to the end,” she whispers, with a smile of inextinguishable love; “my Vine-propp Elme, from first to last!

"How sweet it is!" she says, as her soft eyes gaze lingeringly around the bowery garden, the gleaming doves, and fountain, all gilded in the sun. Tender, full of the past, of dearest, brightest memories, was the glance. Well she knew it was her last, last look upon the scene; that never more would her eyes behold it.

"How very sweet," she says again, "the sun-lit earth!—is it like the God-lit heart, my Wymonde?"

Then her gaze goes heavenward again, and *there* does her dear hand point, as she speaks, and he listens—listens with sudden tremblings and quiverings of the lip, but with ear that could not weary, with eye that could never satisfy with turning upon her.

Home! home is her theme; the heavenly home to which she is speeding—the home to which he must come to her; but not yet; here must he linger for a season; here must he be a sometime pilgrim and sojourner. Oh, may his foot not weary, nor his heart be heavy! for ever will he be drawing nigher to her, and to Home.

Their souls cleave together; evermore are they each other's, she says. And her voice thrills with sudden strength, and her soft angel eyes light up, as she prays him never—never to dis sever himself from the God of Love; never to lose His smile.

In the evening, Philip came ; every day was he there by her own request. "Philip, my brother," she said, as her hand left its gentle pressure upon his.

They took their coffee in her drawing-room. "It was so pleasant to see them, and have them all about her," she told Lillas.

Fever was on her ; her hand burning, her eye and cheek most brilliant. For some time had she sat up conversing cheerfully, her smile beaming forth, when she suddenly whispered Wymonde, that she felt faint.

He laid her down upon the couch, her head low, as he always did when faintness came, one arm round her, his fingers resting on the pulse at her wrist. The Doctor was in the room, and quickly at her side.

So long did the faintness last, that all gathered round the couch in deep alarm ; and breath was held, and eyes riveted upon her in intense watching for returning life : and back it came at length ; her eyes opened, and she saw them all gathered round her.

"I am better," she said softly, with a smile which, in its comprehensiveness of love, seemed to beam and shine upon them all ; yet did it rest first, and linger last, in love unutterable, on him who was bending over, and encircling her with his arm.

Again she grew faint. Life ebbed and flowed—it ebbed and flowed again—till all at once the pulse, which Wymonde's fingers had never quitted, fluttered wildly and stopped,—again, strangely fluttered on.

He looked up to the Doctor : white grew his face, as though the life-blood in his veins was curdling ; death-white his lips ; and they fashioned words demanding instant aid and help, but no sound thence proceeded. Lo ! he was dumb, speechless.

— Be still—be still, all ye that stand around ; let no sigh or sob be heard. From thee, O lover, let no voice or moan of living anguish break—thou hast a life-time for thy grief—Be still. Call her not back—her gentle spirit let depart in peace.

Back came her smile ; it deepened ; Heaven's rapture, ecstasy, was in it ; scarce mortal looked the features, in that effulgent radiance, that glorified light which filled them.

The smile faded—dimmed ; the loving bosom heaved with one long breath, and she was gone ! —From *him*, from earth, and all that earth held for her, she had pass'd for ever.

THE END.

